DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 163 500 CS 204 573

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TITLE The Slower Learner in the Scottish Secondary School.
INSTITUTION Centre for Information on the Teaching of English, Edinburgh (Scotland).
PUB DATE Jun 76
NOTE 52p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$3.50 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Children; Cognitive Processes; *Communication Skills; Early Childhood Education; Educationally Disadvantaged; Educational Research; Foreign Countries; *Language Development; Language Skills; *Reading Instruction; Reading Materials; *Reading Processes; Secondary Education; *Slow Learners; *Socioeconomic Background

ABSTRACT

This collection of papers deals with the slower learner in the Scottish secondary school. The first paper, "Language and Learning," presents ways of classifying slow learners and the classroom activities designed for them. The second paper, "The Teaching of Reading," discusses reading as a thinking process and offers teaching methods based upon this idea. The third paper, "Communication Skills in Early Childhood," reports on the findings of a long-term study of the ways in which children develop and use language. The final paper, "The Socio-economic Background to Slower Learning," represents statistics from a child development study undertaken to determine the connection between slow learners and their social and economic backgrounds. An appendix contains a bibliography of reading materials for the nonacademic/disadvantaged/slow-learning pupil. (FL)

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ED163500

THE SLOWER LEARNER

IN THE

SCOTTISH SECONDARY SCHOOL

MORAY HOUSE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION JUNE 1976

Centre for Information on the Teaching of English

PAPERS FROM THE NATIONAL COURSE:

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JAMES BRITTON	LANGUAGE AND LEARNING
DONALD MOYLE	THE TEACHING OF READING
JOAN TOUGH	COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
TOM MEENAGH	THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND TO SLOWER LEARNING

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LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

James Britton

I was delighted to be asked to come to this conference because I have been an admirer of C.I.T.E. since it's inception, but I must say that it was a sort of distant prospect for a long time. It wasn't until I received this report that I really faced up to the nature of the occasion, and I think what I really want to say to you in starting this morning is that I was inspired and encouraged by reading that report*. I cannot add a great deal to what is there. What I want to add to it is by way of paragraphs in parenthesis or footnotes to the report, and if what I say today seems rather dispersed, it is because I have centred it upon the report; and I hope it makes coherent comment upon the report even if it only gains its coherence by reference to the report.

First, a brief, I think familiar, statement of the assumptions I'm making in commenting on the report. I'm commenting on the report in the belief that language has a role to play with regard to experience - we often say that it is experience that makes us the kind of people we are - but I believe we are the potters, not the clay. It is what we make of our experiences that makes us the kind of people we are, and my feeling is that language is one of the major ways in which we make something of experience. Language is a means of representing the world to ourselves, and we need to represent the world to ourselves if we are to operate in it. It's a familiar idea, it's one which has grown by convergence of many thinkers over the past fifty years. The philosophers began it, the linguists and psychologists and more recently the sociologists have taken it up. And there is a tremendous convergence of interest in the role that language can play as a means of symbolising or representing to ourselves the world we live in.

I suppose Cassirer[1.] is the man we go back to - the man who began it all, writing in Germany forty years ago, crudely in some ways. Cassirer noticed that human beings were less immediate in their responses to changes in their environment than other creatures were. They were a bit slow in responding to changes in the environment, and he explained it this way. He said that all creatures have sets of nerves which bring in signals from the outside world and have sets of nerves which carry out the responses to those signals; and that in all creatures right up the phylogenetic or the evolutionary scale these two systems are linked together. When you come to man, for the first time on the developing scale there is a third system shunted across those two - and that is the symbolic system. So man does not respond immediately to the signals from the outside world. He takes in those signals, builds them into his total picture of what the world is like, what it has meant to him in the past, and he responds in the light of that interpretation. So the symbolic system is the third system shunted between those two.

And then, Sapir[2.], the father of American linguistics as he is called, the father of modern linguistics I think you might call him, Sapir takes it up. We often say that the primary function of language is to communicate with each other. It's approximate, but it's not strictly true, says Sapir. It's best to admit, he goes on, that language is primarily a linguistic manifestation of our tendancy to see reality symbolically. In other words, part of a general tendancy to symbolise experience, to represent the world to ourselves and to act in the light of that representation. So, he says, we don't handle reality ad hoc and directly, but we act in the real world via our representation of experience. Then he wants to point /

*English for Slower Learning Children in the Scottish Secondary School, HMSO 1977.

point out that language is only one way of representing experience and we can't get it right unless we see it in close relationship with other ways of representing experience. For example, you may have come into this group and caught sight of a familiar face; well, that means that something you saw in the room chimed with something you brought in with you and what you brought in with you was a visual, mainly visual, representation of something that happened to you in the past. Unless we see language as embedded in other ways of representing experience, we shall get our emphasis wrong.

Suzanne Langer[3] - she's one of the philosophers who came early to this idea - makes an important point: she says that we use language primarily to 'bring things into our minds' and not so much to 'bring things into our hands'. She points out that when they trained Helen Keller they were trying very hard to help the little child who had no language because she was deaf, couldn't speak and was blind, and it was a very difficult job to attempt to get through to her so she could learn a language which was a language of tapping on the hand. Her teacher stayed with her all the time and taught her, and tried hard to get her to ask for a drink when she was thirsty, to ask to go to bed when she was tired, and so on. And it wasn't working very well, and then one day they went out into the yard on a sunny morning and her teacher put her hand under the pump where someone was pumping water and spelt out on the other hand, the name, the letters of water, and it suddenly came to Helen Keller and she tells this story herself in her autobiography - it suddenly came to her that this signal meant this thing that was happening to her. She walked back to the house asking the names of everything she could perceive. She describes this as a sudden dawning of a light, the idea that you can use language to bring things into your mind, and from the moment when she realised the purpose of language - not simply a way of asking for what you want but a way of reaping past experience - of bringing past experience to bear upon present experience - that was the discovery that made language work for her.

We represent events to ourselves, events happen and are gone. The representation lasts in time so we can work on it, we can go back and work upon experiences and work on each other's experiences. You might say that my job this morning is to use language to work upon your past experiences of slower learners and things that happen in school. It's a cumulative process, we add to-day to yesterday. But it's not simply cumulative. It's not like rolling a snowball around and getting more snow on the outside. Any new event may require that we adjust, modify, the picture of experience we have so far built up. We hope that as we go through experiences we adjust our expectations as to what may yet happen to us in the light of what's happening to us now. Of course, we needn't do that. We can ignore experiences. We can refuse to make the adjustment. I suppose we all do that in some areas but the more we do it the more we build up a picture of the world for ourselves that isn't a true one, so we come more and more to live in a fool's paradise.

If you and I shared the same experience, we should represent it differently to ourselves - the way in which we represent and store that experience would differ from you to me because we are not simply acting as cameras. We're acting partly as cameras - we're taking in onto the screen what is in the world outside - but at the same time we're projecting our desires about the world and our knowledge about the world - what you project from your experience is different from what I project from my experience and the resultant picture of what we see now is different for you from what it is for me, for that reason.

If we are to use past experience as a way of predicting future experience, we have to create categories for experience. Bruner[4] in one of his early books, A Study of Thinking, makes this very clear. He says there is no use in knowing that/

that experience A was followed by experience B, because experience A will never happen again. It makes all the difference in the world to know that an experience of type A was followed by an experience of type B because then when an experience of type A happens you know to expect an experience of type B. In other words you only begin to learn from experience when you segment the flow of unique events and begin to make categories. Of course some of the most exciting work on language acquisition in recent years by Bruner, by others, by Gordon Wells, by Dan Slobin, people all over the world, has come from working upon studies of children's language. One of the most exciting phases there has been to start before they've got language and see how infants make sense of the world without language and then see how language dovetails with the sense they have already made in terms of their movement and perception.

Of course, even the dogs you know have built some categories of experience. They get excited if you take the lead off the hook. I knew a dog once who got excited if I stuck stamps on a letter. It wasn't sticking stamps on the letter that excited him - that was the experience of type A which he knew from past experience was likely to be followed by an experience of type B. So they get their categories by which they can anticipate experience. But, of course, when language comes along it makes a tremendous difference to the number of categories that we can handle. A word becomes the filing pin upon which we file successive experiences and so the number of categories we can make increases tremendously once we acquire language.

Bruner also points out in that same book that we need to classify. The usual example is the Eskimos who have seven words for 'snow'. Snow matters so much to the Eskimos that they have seven categories where we only have one. We say 'snow' and it covers all kinds of snow. If we want to be more particular, we have to make a longer expression - 'the kind of snow that makes good snowballs', for example. The Eskimos' language is different - they divide the phenomena up differently - they have seven categories where we have only one. We create the categories and we mark them with language and our children pick up the language and the categories with them.

The other example is that there are seven million - the physicists say there are seven million distinctions that you can make through the spectrum of colour. They eye can perceive differences throughout the spectrum between seven million distinct phenomena. But if we had to name those distinct phenomena, we'd never get through the day's business, on colour alone. We need to classify. We must make relationships between categories of things and not unique things in order to achieve control of our experiences.

We need to classify, and yet we classify at our peril. Some of you, I think, will have read Eysenck's work. Eysenck[5] did a study of anti-Semetism - it was very interesting. He found that people with strong anti-Semetic prejudices were very much better at distinguishing in a whole set of photographs, Jewish faces from non-Jewish faces. But they were very much worse at distinguishing the differences among Jewish faces. There is a nice little experiment done by a Cambridge psychologist called Tajfel[6] some ten years ago. He got people to do the very simplest kind of classifying. He simply made cards with two lines drawn on them of different lengths and he gave them to people one after the other and asked them to estimate in centimetres the lengths of each of the two lines. One set of cards, shown to half the sample, had A marking the longer line and B marking the shorter line - but there was no other difference . . the task was the same, they simply had to estimate the lengths of each of the two lines and the effect of that A and B classification, simply labelling the longer line A and the shorter line B, was that the people in that group were significantly different in the way that they maximised differences. They estimated the longer lines to be longer than they were and the shorter lines to be/

be shorter than they were. We classify at our peril. Once we classify and allot something to a category, we tend to take over and apply all the characteristics that belong to that category.

I make that warning now, because what I want to do for the rest of my time is to look at ways of classifying. I want to do that in two areas. I want to look at ways of classifying slower learners - just 2 or 3 ways - and then 2 or 3 ways of classifying classroom activities for slower learners.

There is always a danger in classifying that, in order to create categories, we force things apart. In order to exemplify and set up the difference between sets of things we force them apart, and this is a useful way to construct the background frame of reference against which to make sense of our experience. We have to do that - we need to classify. When we come to apply categories we find the opposite process. Everything tends to flow. It's important to remember and this is something that your report does suggest, that there are no simple ways of docketing slower learners. I'm not suggesting simple ways, I'm suggesting overlapping ways. In other words, you need to see what is the value on this set of criteria and the value on that set of criteria. So you get overlapping categories and a slower learner will come into more than one of those. So your classification will be more subtle and more helpful for you than if you found a set of pigeon holes and put each slower learner totally into one pigeon hole.

Slower learners - the definition I take from the report here - I've simplified it a bit - really, slower learners are those who cannot keep up with the rest. But that does make a tremendous assumption that I want to point out. That makes the assumption - it makes many assumptions in fact, but this one in particular - that we take on responsibility that we are in fact aiming at achieving writing and reading for all children. The work we do with children is geared to listening and talking and writing and reading, and if we define slower learners as those who don't keep up with the rest - what are the rest doing? The rest are moving on towards greater competence in listening and writing and reading - an assumption that we may need to challenge but we'll come back to that later. Then again in preliminary I want to suggest that slower learners are the area where our teaching is most strongly challenged by failure and all of us who have had experience of teaching will know what this means. It's the area where children demand most of us as teachers and where if we are able to respond adequately, we will do our best teaching. That gives the topic of the slower learner a central importance to the whole education system. What we discover in studying this problem isn't simply of the limited value that other people might impose on something which is referring only to slower learners. We're concerned with what is essentially good teaching and what we've learned there will be of value throughout the whole system. That's why I welcome this report and I welcome the organisation which has set up a focus here on that particular problem.

It's more than ever necessary with slower learners to insist on a sound view of learning. Our system has got away with an unsound view of learning far too long: the replicative view of learning: the view of learning where the pupil gives back to the teacher what the teacher gave to the pupil, and where that can be measured by tests and examinations and all will be well. You know exactly what I mean, I'm sure. I've seen it in Departments of Education, where the lecturers shoot off their rockets every Friday morning and the net is the examination which catches them at the end of the course and the student is marked by what has been caught in his net - and this may have nothing to do with his teaching experience at all and may have nothing to do with the problems he's facing in the classroom. The replicative view of learning.

When/

When we look at slower learners, we have above all to realize that learning means learning how to learn and the emphasis is not upon a synoptic syllabus, it's not upon a method of covering the ground, it's concerned with the process of learning.

Well, the first way of classifying is a pretty obvious one which I take straight from your report. Slower learners may be classified as the under-achievers or the poor fellow who seems to be slow all round: those who are all-round poor achievers. It may be easy to identify the under-achievers, the obvious ones, but the identification as to whether the all-round slower learner is in fact an under achiever or an all-round slower learner is a long process of elimination. It takes very great patience and time on the part of the teacher. You have to get along-side the child in order to discover what his abilities are. It relies upon the relationship fo intimacy and trust between you and the child which again is something I welcome strongly in this draft. It relies upon continuity of the child and teacher and that doesn't only mean the point stressed here, continuity over the years, but also over the minutes and the hours. And it may be that the way we move from child to child when we have 30 children to contend with, particularly in primary school, is the biggest difficulty in getting the slower learner going because the teacher's ability to be at hand to keep the enterprise alive with the slower learner may be one of the first things that is lost. So it's continuity in terms of the immediate enterprises over the minutes and hours as well as over the years.

George Kelly[7.] is a psychologist whom I like to bring into anything I say at any time because he seems to me to offer the best background for learning theory. George Kelly was a personality psychologist in Ohio and his personal construct psychology seems to me to be an ideal picture of learning. He says about patients: what clinical psychologists have to do is to "join the patient in testing the limits of his unsuspected talents" - you can't do it from outside. This category is an important one and a tricky one to apply.

For the second category I want to quote from page 34 of the document:

"It's difficult for us to imagine in what ways an illiterate child lives with a knowledge of his inadequacy. There is at once a horror at his condition and a desperate search for release from it. And when no release seems possible, frustration leads either to anger which resolves itself in purposeless violence, or to a dreamlike condition which takes him further away than ever from being able to relate in any satisfying way to the real world."

That strongly reminded me of two of the five categories of slower learners which an American psychologist, Spache, has set up in a document in 1957. His first two categories of the five were the overtly hostile aggressive intolerant and second those below normal in hostility, excessively apt to accept blame. Not quite the same as chosen in the report, but similar categories. In other words, a dichotomy on the basis of aggression. Those who reject, become aggressive and hostile, and those who withdraw, become excessively unaggressive: those who seem hopeless in their inadequacy, unable to rouse themselves to do anything about it.

In practice that distinction depends a great deal upon the context. It's not something the child brings with him and preserves intact, it's something which is a response to a situation which he finds himself in. In practice, it seems to me you can make a simpler division which is very useful, and that is of the willing and the unwilling, and I think that the slower learners/

learners who are willing will offer a very different problem from the unwilling. I've been very much concerned in London over the last 20 years with the education of the unwilling at the secondary stage. More and more turned-off kids and more and more run-down schools. And I have seen it above all in going in with my own students in their teaching practice - it's becoming more and more difficult for a beginner to survive in the kinds of classroom situations that are growing in many secondary schools in the inner-city areas. I believe it's a very urgent problem. I believe it's closely concerned with your problem with slower learners, though obviously it relates to only one category of slower learners. And I think that unless we do something about it pretty quickly it's going to turn the system upside down.

My solution, and I offer this very humbly because I've gained it from other people - I've gained it from watching teachers who are actually facing the problem and dealing with it when everything else, because of hostility and rejection on the part of the kids, when everything else fails to work. If you are an English teacher, you have a solution, and that is to attempt to gear the child's language to his own experience - which is equivalent to making the children themselves into the curriculum - to get them to write about themselves (though not in any kind of prying spirit) - in other words, to encourage them to articulate their view of the world.

This happened at least ten years ago. It was one example of a student of mine netting something of this kind years ago, a pupil writing about her view of the world, and the bit of the world she's talking about is her teacher in school. This is a 14-year old in a London comprehensive school writing about her teacher. She calls it "Getting the Message":

"You gave me a piece of paper and you said, "Write down the whole story in your own words", and you left me for half an hour. And when you came back, you were so pleased - I handed you two pages of writing. When you sat down you said, "I know what you're going through". I wanted to laugh, because you <u>don't</u> know - and you're just like every other teacher who's given me a pep talk and like all the others, you probably read my story and thought "poor girl", and if you thought it was the truth, you must be thick. And when you teachers huddle together in the staffroom and discuss me in whispered tones, you think I don't know the names you call me - well, I do, because they've been said to my face before and it's not as if I bother any more. . . So I'll sit here and listen patiently while you reel off the usual, in your sugary voice, and when you finish, I'll say "Yes, Ma'am, and thank you, Ma'am". And you'll be so childishly pleased and you'll think you've helped me, but you're wrong and no-one of your sort can help me, because you're in a different generation and you'll never understand me. So, I'll carry on writing pages and pages of semi-truths and I'll laugh at you from behind my hair."

Well, it takes some taking, doesn't it? And, of course, it's creeping down, it's creeping down to a younger and younger age. I'm not going to weary you with further dramatic examples but I came across one only last week in a Newcastle school, which is quite blood curdling. We feel as teachers the kind of conflict that that particular teacher has been put in by that kind of behaviour from children. We've just had Women's Year, but we didn't have any Teenagers' Year but the teenagers won that battle very completely years and years ago. You can't put the clock back - the generation gap is a sociological phenomenon of our time - we can never go back to the time when it was enough to say 'because I said so'. And I think it's an evolutionary change. It's a change in the right direction - it's no use trying to get back.

It sounds easy to say get them to write about themselves and make them a curriculum, get them to articulate their view of the world. It's highly dangerous/

dangerous and yet it's a risk that I see no alternative to. And this was where I quarrelled with the Bullock Committee. For almost two and a half years we had worked on the evidence and the drafting - every line of it was considered and discussed in committee. It gathered together slowly, and then finally we got all the typescript together to read it through. And when I sat down and read it through, I was horrified at the tone that seemed to suggest that twenty people sitting round the table knew all the answers and were giving them to those who ought to know them. And, in fact, the problem that I'm now talking about was one that the members of that committee simply had not faced, and they were unwise to define the role of the English teacher so firmly without taking that problem into account. So I wrote a statement which ended up as a 'Note of Extension'. It makes the point that there are teachers in the classroom facing the problem of rejection that the school has brought on and turning on the kids that have been turned off, and they're doing it by methods which don't seem to chime with the picture of the English teacher given in the Bullock Report. They are aiming at what the Bullock Committee said they were aiming at, but their means of getting there and their timing is entirely at odds with that. There are people getting children to use their own dialect about their own view of the world and maybe doing no more than that before the child leaves at the age of sixteen. They are on the right road but it doesn't look to the Bullock Committee as though that's what they are doing.

It's a matter for the slower learner of finding a way in. All this may be going on among slower learners of one sort or another but because the pace doesn't admit him, we have to stop and help him find a way in; and the way in might well be in writing about himself - reading what other people have written about themselves, so that he begins to see his situation in relation to other members of the class.

Thirdly, I want to suggest another way of classifying - I do this very tentatively because I'm passing on to you material I don't fully understand. This is another American linguist, a survivor of the Germanic school of linguistics, one of the last of that school, but he's been working most of his lifetime in America. He's called Roman Jakobson[8] and he has a book called 'Studies in Child Language and Aphasia' and because it's called 'Studies in Child Language and Aphasia', it has not been very widely read, it looks rather specialist, and I suppose in some ways it is, but it does bring us a very important idea. He says himself that he thinks it's of basic importance but no-one has taken much notice of it yet. I don't know if I can do justice to it but I'm going to try. I'm with him in this respect that he says there are two sets of rules that underlie language operations. In the first, the operation is one based upon similarity and in the second, the operation is based upon contiguity. So whenever you make an utterance you select what it is you want to talk about, you select the noun you want to use to name it, you select the verb you want to refer to the action and the thing you reject as opposed to the one you select, that's the relationship of similarity between those items. You might have talked about a turnip when in fact you talked about a parsnip. The parsnip and turnip and carrot and so on were the alternatives from which you chose, so the relationship of similarity was between the turnip, the parsnip and so on. In the utterance you said something about the parsnip. In other words, you put together on the page or in the utterance, a series of words, so you had words next door to each other - that's the relationship of contiguity. You had one set of rules for the substitutability in the relationship of similarity, the turnip as opposed to the parsnip, you have one set of rules that make it possible to put together a verb and a noun, an adjective and a noun, but not certain other things. The rules for combination, most of the rules of syntax, are a different set of rules from the rules by which we select on the similarity basis. These two principles are operating in all our utterances.

That/

That sort of thing is fairly familiar, but he then goes on to suggest that children who are aphasic, children with a severe language deficiency, may be, or in fact he finds them to be, deficient in one of these two ways. In other words he can classify the aphasics. The usual way of classifying is the receptive and the productive, in other words those who find very great difficulty in understanding language and less in creating it, generating it, and those who find difficulty in generating it and less in receiving it and that has marked the major divisions in aphasics for a long time. He suggests that other divisions are more basic ones: there are those who have a similarity disorder and those who have a contiguity disorder. A similarity disorder will result in the end with people who keep up a flow of speech but it has very little meaning and any word will inspire them to come up with more language. You could start them off and they will carry on, but it will make very little sense. The other disorder, the contiguity disorder, results in telegraphic speech where key words are blurted out in confusion in a fragmentary way. Not that doesn't matter to us in the sense that any aphasics we come across will be dealt with by other people. What he does go on to say is that since there is this difference in severe disorders, it is likely to reflect a kind of predilection in all speakers, and this may cover not only an individual speaker but a whole culture pattern. He suggests that metaphor, which is a figure based on similarity, is characteristic of Romantic writers and the study of metaphor is an important part of the criticism of romantic works. Whereas metonymy, a contiguity figure, on which there has been very little study is just as important and just as crucial to the way a realistic novel is constructed. So we may have a literary style resulting from a predilection for the one process as distinct from the other. What I'm wondering therefore is whether in fact among slower learners we might find a distinction of this kind. The importance of it would be this - the ability to operate with similarity enables a speaker to use language about language. In other words, to move from the French language to the English language to move from a picture to a word, to move from one style of speech to another style of writing requires a substitution and the substitutability is the similarity operation. So the similarity operation has to be strong in order for us to use what the linguists call, meta-language. Meta-linguistics, words about words, language about language, relies upon strength in the similarity operation. And, of course, the ability to use language about language has occurred more and more in literature with regard to children learning to read. I expect some of you will know a publication called Language by ear and by eye - a report of a conference on listening and reading. One of the things they came up with in that report is that they won't talk about 'the listener', they call him 'the speaker-listener', they won't talk about 'the reader', they will talk about 'the writer-reader'. In other words, they say that the language reception processes 'have somehow to borrow the machinery of production'. And they go on to claim that the reading-writing processes rely upon what they call 'linguistic awareness'. So they've got two levels of competence. Basic competence results in acquiring the spoken language and, as we know, the ability to speak is very little related to intelligence or any of the other general factors we talk about - it's almost universal; given normal physical conditions, a small child succeeds in learning to speak. So basic competence is almost universal.

And they say there is a second level of competence which they call 'linguistic awareness' which may be a necessary threshhold in learning to read; they even suggest that not all children may have it. When Bruner was in Edinburgh in 1974, he gave a paper[10.] in which he talked about analytic competence and again he was distinguishing this from basic competence. I think Bruner's analytic competence is very much the same sort of thing as 'linguistic awareness'.

'Linguistic awareness', the writers of the MIT conference suggest, is demonstrated in any kind of meta-linguistic utterances: you know how small children will sometimes say 'where do words come from?' or 'why do we say one child,/

child, two children and not one child, two childs?' and so on, and very young children will raise this sort of meta-linguistic matter. It's metalinguistics if you say to somebody 'Did you say so-and-so?' or 'What did you mean by so-and-so?'. It's questioning his use of the code, you are both using the English language, you question his use of it - that's a meta-linguistic remark. This sort of remark is keyed to what is called linguistic awareness and they see it also exemplified in versification. Again you get kids who can take up the iambic pentameter and reel it off. Kids who can versify, who can muck around with language in that objective way because language must somehow come into the focus of attention so that they can manipulate language and not simply utter, which is to let the language alight on what they want to say. Now, I'm a great believer in letting language alight on what you want to say, but I do believe there is something to be looked at in the way in which children turn language back upon language and that may well be related to the ease or difficulty they have in learning to read.

Now I must hurry on. I want to look at ways of classifying classroom activities. Let me refer back to the draft report. On page 35, where the four aims are recapitulated, we have a paragraph there which really sets aims A,B and C over and against aim D. D is the grindstone - all right? Am I right in taking it that you know what I'm talking about - that you've read the report? The actual comment is this: on page 35.

> "It then becomes a matter of teacher choice and experience whether the child's nose is put to the grindstone by concentrating on mastery of his deficiencies or whether the child's deficiences can be worked on through a wider range of language experience."

So aims A, B and C as against aim D.

I want to begin somewhere else and work up to that. There's a nice book by Courtney Cazden[11] called 'Child Language and Education' in which she reports an experiment carried out by Slobinand Welch, two other American linguists, who are studying what structures a two and a half year old girl is capable of achieving. They wanted to study her grammatical growth and they were doing it by what they thought was a very rigorous method. The christened her Echo. And what they did, the method, was to offer her little bits of language and ask her to repeat them. And they were logging the bits of language, the structures that she was able successfully to repeat, and that was the inventory of the structures she could master according to their method.

They were rather upset when every now and again, she would generate spontaneously sentences which she ought not to have been able to master by the schedule they had prepared for her. And when she said one morning at breakfast "If you eat your eggs all up, Daddy, you can have some coffee", they noted this down as an example of a structure she ought not to be able to master according to their records. So, of course, being good researchers, they tried this back on her, and they found she couldn't repeat it. So they collected a few more examples of these spontaneous utterances and tried them back on her at various intervals and came up with the finding that if they offered them back to her within five minutes of her having spoken them, she was able to imitate them, to repeat them correctly. If there was a longer interval she wasn't. So contextual support, the fact that coffee, the eggs and so on were still in sight, was part of it, but it didn't account for all of it. So they said it must be sensible to talk about "the intention to say so and so", There must be such a thing within the child as "the intention to say so and so" and if they offer her the structure when the intention is still alive she can master the structure. Again, being good researchers, they scrapped what they were doing and said obviously we aren't getting the child's real resources by beginning at the language end, we have to begin with the intention end. So they logged her spontaneous utterances and /

and classified them and they made the very clear point that we do not tap the child's real resources if we offer them a linguistic piece of work to do. It's only when language is serving their intentions that we can get the full measure of their mastery of language.

I've got three beads on this piece of string - that's the first bead. The second one is quite different - it comes from Bruner. An article that Bruner wrote in 1973 on child development which he called 'The Organisation of Early Skilled Action'[12]. So we're not now talking about language. He was looking at babies of a year or less. He was looking at what he calls the way they used their hands to solve problems. The child that I'm quoting was of a very early age - a child of about three months old who was able to sit upright and had got to the stage of wanting to grasp and pick up something which attracts his attention. Bruner is observing at the moment when this is what he wants to do but we know from past experience that he isn't going to succeed because although that's what he wants to do, he is not yet able to make use of 'feed-back' in such a way that he can coordinate his actions correctly in order to succeed. But that's what he wants to do. It's important to make this point because what happens according to Bruner is that all sorts of systems in the child's body are alerted by this intention. For example, the child's muscles in his lips and jaws start moving because what he wants to do is grasp the thing and bite at it. As he intends to grasp this, so the activity begins. There is also a much more subtle and difficult to measure activity to be seen which is anti-gravitational activity. In other words, muscles of the back and arms; and Bruner even says that these movements are relative to the size of the object he is trying to pick up. Now, we all know about feedback, and feedback has to monitor his activity in order for it to succeed. What Bruner is now talking about is 'feed-forward' - it's anticipatory activity. Bruner sees a whole range of different systems alerted by the intention. So Bruner comes as near as ever to talking about tacit powers. In other words, the intention to grasp the object releases within the child preparatory activities favourable to success. And, it's even there before success has been experienced. With teachers it's important to remember this because teachers often feel that we can't intend to do something we can't do, but of course, we can.

My last example, my last bead on that string about intention, comes from Michael Polanyi[13]. who's a scientist who wrote on the philosophy of science - a book called 'Personal Knowledge'. 'Personal Knowledge' deals with what Polanyi calls tacit powers, and this doesn't mean anything at all mysterious, it simply means the things we do that we couldn't brief ourselves to do. One example is the way our eyes operate for us. Our eyes prepare for us a focussed and coherent view of what it is we want to see. And they do it says Polanyi, to their own specification. Our eyes had to learn to do that, we had to learn to do it, but we don't know how to do it. We couldn't specify what it is we do - we couldn't brief our eyes as to how to do it. Our eyes have, for example, to learn that if something we're looking at suddenly seems to get larger, it's probably coming towards us and we'd better duck. Our eyes have learned that so well that if we now go to the psychology laboratory and peer through a small hole against a blank wall which has a tennis ball against it and the psychologist inflates the tennis ball without our knowing it's being done we shall duck, we shall be quite certain that the tennis ball is being thrown straight to our eye. But our eyes have to acquire that judgement, that discrimination. Polanyi then goes on to say that the same sort of thing happens with tools - we invest with tacit powers the instruments we use also. He takes a very simple example: imagine yourself probing under the dressing-table for a collar-stud or a hair-slide that you've dropped behind it. It's out of reach, and it's in the dark, so you go and get a walking stick and you probe under the dressing-table to try and get it. Imagine yourself doing that. Polanyi says, the focus of your attention must be on the far end of the stick. You've only got the near end to manipulate, so you've got to be aware of this, and that's got to be subsidiary awareness. If you make that a focal awareness, you'll be clumsy and you probably won't/

won't succeed. Your focus of awareness is on the far end of the stick, the subsidiary on the means to achieving that end. If you watch people playing darts - this isn't Polanyi - this is what came to me while sitting in the pub after reading Polanyi - they stand here, all this distance away, and they manipulate this dart, and they can only do it from here and yet they are actually living over there, the focus of attention is on that double top, and it's concentrating upon that that releases the unspecifyable muscular activities which the fingers carry out. So, Polanyi says, focus your attention upon the aim you have in mind, what you intend to do with the stick and let your manipulation be subordinated to that focus.

He then moves on to language, and says exactly what I now want to say about language. When he comes to language, it's the intention end and not the language end that we ought to begin with. The desired performance through language is what we should concentrate on in order for the tacit powers to be released as Slobin and Welch found them to be released in the small child when she wanted to say something.

So, with slow learners in particular, I want us to think in terms of enterprises arising from their intentions, brief ones, which become units of success, something they've done and know they can do, and I'd like to think of us increasing the number of these units, and then increasing the relationships between them. And let them be quite brief enterprises and let them be quite disparate in the early stages, and simply let's collect them as things that have been achieved. And I think we'll have to minimise any distinction we make about physical and mental, in other words the physical and mental will be operating side by side. Some of the enterprises may seem very little related to language.

That's a very crude way of looking at teaching - a way of describing the harnessing of a child's own intentions to applying skilled mastery of language. It's in line with something which has come very recently of considerable importance from Bruner again, Bruner and Olson[14] in an American Year book - the National Society for Studies in Education, 73rd Year Book, on language, on means of symbolising. There's a splendid article there by Bruner and Olson, called 'Learning through Experience and Learning through Media'. They begin by criticising the naive psychology that underlies a great deal of teaching. A naive view of knowledge:

> "that the effects of experience can be considered as knowledge; that knowledge is conscious; and that knowledge can be translated into words. Symmetrically, words can be translated into knowledge, hence one can learn - that is one can acquire knowledge - from being told".

They go on to suggest that in fact knowledge and skill have been dichotomised, have been forced apart, and what we need to do is to bring knowledge and skill into a dynamic relationship again. If you perform, if you do a piece of writing, your knowledge is called upon at various turning points in your performance. Performance calls upon skill; as you move through the task, you require knowledge and you require it at various choice points in the performance. So the performance will organically relate knowledge and skill, in a way that is desirable. What they are suggesting is that learning is above all achieved by performance in a medium. But, of course, all media are not equally suitable, so they qualify that by saying 'performance in a range of culturally important media'. For example, speaking would be one such medium, writing another, drawing, painting, dramatic work, experiment, manipulation, objective manipulation, and so on. What they don't realise is how a theory of learning of that kind will open the gates to allow children's intentions to play a much greater part in what goes on in the school than at present we can allow.

So, the view that the slow learner is incapable of finding out for himself and hence he's had it made easy by being told and having it spelt out, is in fact the enemy. It's a very widely held view that the slow learner is somebody who is incapable of finding out for himself and therefore must have it told simply and clearly spelt out. The other view is that he above all needs to rehearse for himself the major steps by which he can find out because he is the least able to use and apply what others have arrived at. And this relates to the matter of input, which is referred to on page 53 of the report; and to Bruner's child grasping the object. One of the jobs of the teacher is to select an attractive object and put it there so the child may try to grasp: what we need to get, we need to integrate the in-school and out of school learning of the slower learners. What the teacher puts there, what life puts there may equally be used as a basis for enterprises, for activities. In other words, I suppose we've always as teachers recognised that we reap harvests we haven't sown. We ought to be reaping harvests we haven't sown, we ought to be capitalising on the learning that's already going on and that goes on outside school, it ought to be made part and parcel of the learning that goes on inside school.

So that's rather a long time on the first of my divisions. As far as the second of my divisions for the kinds of activity that might go on, I want to start on page 35 of the report, where the dichotomy between aims 1 and 2 is considered.

> "When a teacher is in discussion with his pupils he should be clear minded about whether he's bent upon extending their vocabulary by means of talk about matters beyond their normal ken, or whether he's encouraging them to talk to their own satisfaction about something very much within their own experience."

In other words there is the aim 1 and there is the aim 2 and the teacher should be clear in his mind as to which of those he's tackling. This is where I most want to be critical of what the report says: I think that that needs further questioning. I referred earlier to getting the children to like to talk about themselves, when they do that they are re-working the data of their experience. And it's by re-working the data of their experience that they incorporate a new experience. You can only be told something if you've got somewhere to put the new information. 'Having somewhere to put it' means having a network of past experiences and knowledge into which the new information fits in such a way that it makes sense. So when you go back over experiences you're employing the basic processes by which you also incorporate new experiences. To incorporate new experiences means a revision of past experiences. I don't see there can be any clear distinction made between talking and writing about things that have happened to us and entering into and using talk to make our own, for example, things other people tell us, things 'beyond our normal ken'. It seems the two processes are essentially parts of one process. The organisation of our past experience is the same sort of process as that by which we organise to receive new information. Rather than face up to that one further, I'll move to my third point here, which is to suggest that when we're using language, we can classify the kinds of activities they do in accordance with a scheme which is familiar, I know, to some of you already, where you can talk about the purposes of speaking and writing as being either transactional, expressive or poetic.

Expressive is a central term in all sorts of ways. It's a starting point, the matrix from which the other uses are developed. Expressive speech is speech which is close to the speaker, not projected very far from the speaker, in other words, it's the speech between people who know each other well and it's the kind of speech that on the whole we use in face to face talk with anybody unless we want to be stiff, distant. It's the speech which gives signals about the speaker's attitude/

attitude to what he wants to talk about. So basically it's an utterance which relies upon interest in the speaker as well as what he says about the subject. And as such you can see how it applies to what goes on in school. We are concerned with the chemistry, or biology or literature or geography the children talk about but we're never concerned with that in isolation from the concern also for them as people. So if this is language which relies upon interest in the speaker as well as what he says about the world, it's obviously important for the language of school, but it's important also for another reason. Because it's the language between intimates, it's the language which relies upon the relationship of trust and it uses that relationship of trust to take risks which we wouldn't take in other situations. In other words, the bright idea that we want to be able to preach to the world or publish in the next monograph - we shall try it out, before it gets to that stage, in expressive talk with people who share our context with us. It's the rehearsal stage for what then later will be transactional. Our bright ideas get discussed in expressive speech, and it may be expressive writing, the kind of paper you put into a research team may be highly expressive. When it is written up for the public to read a great deal of the expressive is sacrificed in order to get directly to the point. I was talking about this in Canada, and somebody gave me a very nice example, They'd been putting up a cabin by the lake, which is the sort of thing they do in Canada, and this chap got the kit which told him how to put up his cabin, and it was very expressive. It was saying, right, here you are, you've got to your site, and you're going to have a lovely time, and this is how you begin, and so on. We decided that if you were a professional putter-up of cabins, you couldn't stand that sort of instruction, could you? In order to do a practical job, you've got to move out of the expressive and into the transactional, and that's part of the training you're after in school.

Looking at that spectrum then from the expressive to the transactional, here's a piece of writing. I hope it's new to most of you, but if not, I apologize. This is a piece of writing that came in as part of our research. We[15] had writing from all subjects of the curriculum and this is an eleven-year- old girl writing for her science teacher on 'How to Make Oxygen'.

> "It's quite easy to make oxygen if you have the right equipment necessary. You'll probably need a test-tube -" (We're in the expressive already, aren't we? I can just imagine my science master - "What do you mean 'probably'? Do you or don't you?") - you'll probably need a test-tube, a large one and a stand with some acid in it. You also need a Bunsen burner. Of course you musn't forget a glass tank too. The test-tube should fit neatly in its place. When you've done that, fix the glass tank and put the curved end upwards. Put the glass tank on the table and fill with water. Very soon you'll find that you've made oxygen and glad of it."

Of course, we wonder whether the science teacher was glad she was glad of it; we hope he was because it shows she enjoyed it and is willing to admit it. Of course, she really is out to inform, to explain how to make oxygen. She might feel like it some other time or someone else might want to make it, or more likely still her teacher might want to know whether she knows how to make oxygen. So, it's an informative task. And how she felt about it the first time is not part of the information she is out to convey. And in due course, she will leave that expressive item, that part which tells so much about her rather than about the oxygen, she will leave that out. But the fact that she was glad of it, suggests she's got the interest and energy to work on the language and that's part of her learning that will go on in school.

Here's another piece that was written by a sixteen year old in a school off the Old Kent Road, near the docks.

"School, ugh! Dad's up having a wash, Mum's gone out to work, sister's gone out, and me, I don't get up until I'm told to. If I had my way I wouldn't get up. Still, I get up, have a wash and go to school. On the way, you see some funny people about these days. Take that old man that lives round the corner. He says he can't get out to get his pension (his old age pension) but when someone gets it for him, he's round the pub like a shot, crafty old man. But anyway, to get back to walking to school. School - what a terrible word. Whoever invented should have been shot. I know your parents say schooldays are the best days of your life. But that was in those days. School was good because you started work when you were twelve, so it was good for the time you were there."

I want to say about that - that wasn't expressive language on the way to anything else at all - that's expressive language for an expressive function. He is inviting us to join in and share a slice of his life. He's not telling us something he has reason to believe we want to know, or even something he wants us to know. He's just setting down a bit of his life - if we want to share it, well, there it is. And that's essentially expressive - the expressive function - which is to exploit 'togetherness' - to make the most of being with someone.

Of course, we want children to learn to distil facts about the world from first hand experience. They have to take a great many facts on trust. When it comes to geography, history and science, they have to take a tremendous amount from other people, on trust. But unless that's founded upon a process of distilling the facts from your own first hand experience, it has a very shaky foundation. So we want children to learn to distil facts about the world, from first hand experience. Here's a piece of writing from a 10-year-old West Riding boy. He begins:

"When we were down at Mr. Harris's farm I brought some water from the brook back with me. I took some from a shallow place by the oak tree, and some from a deep place by the walnut tree."

Then he goes on to tell how he filtered his water specimens and found a lot more silt in the one that came from the deep place 'by the walnut tree'. Now it <u>was</u> Mr. Harris's farm - the whole class knew it because they had been there - and it <u>was</u> an oak tree and it <u>was</u> a walnut tree - these were all part of the experience for him, though they're not a part of the facts that he set out to distil from the experience - they're not a part of his 'experiment'. So he's in the process of distilling facts about the world. But by using expressive language in that way, he's sharing with us the process of distilling the facts, not simply the end product, not simply distilled facts, but the process of distilling facts. In the early stages of science teaching or environmental studies, this all-round looking, facing up to the reality of experience, and then the selection from the experience of what's relevant to science or geography or history and so on, is the process which the teacher can share in if he's given it in language. With the slow learners above all, we simply can't wait for the end product, we must be in on the process. It's expressive language which enables us to be in on the process.

My last point is to try to make something of the other spectrum from the expressive to the poetic, and this is much more difficult. I'm on, of course, to what I said about getting kids to write about themselves. Writing about themselves will be on this expressive/poetic spectrum, because as we re-create past experiences in words we're not participating in these experiences since they're not taking place. So we are as it were taking up the role of spectator. And the distinction between the two roles there, is that, we've got language in the role of the participant, using language to get things done in the world: we know we can persuade/

persuade people, instruct people - those are the main transactional functions of language, ways of using language to get things done in the world; and then, we also use language in a different way, when we use it to re-create past experiences not to get something done, but in order to enter into and enjoy those experiences again. Of course, you can describe past experiences in a transactional way. If you start telling me the terrible things that have been happening to you, I think you may be asking me to share and sympathise, and that would be a role of spectator, then, if I find that all you're doing is working up to borrowing a five pound note, then that's a sudden switch - you know, it's something that's all part of a transaction, an ulterior motive towards a highly practical end. Someone giving evidence in a court of law may be reconstructing past experiences in order to contribute to the verdict - and that's transactional; suppose you had an Irish witness who had the gift of the gab and began to warm to his story and told it in such a way that his listeners became involved in it, began to enjoy the story - he'd be using the spectator role, and he'd soon be declared out of order because it would sound so different from what is required in a court of law. So when we re-create past experiences, or enter into other people's accounts of their experiences, or when we create or enter into imagined experiences, both writer and reader, speaker and hearer are taking up the role of spectator when they do this for the sake of doing it, for the pleasure of doing it. In other words these utterances are preoccupations. What happens then is that language becomes itself the focus of attention. Transactional language is a means to an end and the better you use it the more organised it will be to that end. But in the other half of the scale, the big change from the expressive to the poetic is that the further you move towards the poetic [illegible], the more important is the pattern, the organisation of language itself. This isn't an organisation for the sake of clarity or effective communication - it is artistic order, 'formal', dance-like - the patterning of a 'verbal object'. It's not only the forms of language that are organised in this way, but also the pattern of events in a story, the pattern of feelings expressed.

When we go back over events in our minds or in talk with someone in order - as we say - to 'come to terms with them', to accept them into our picture of what life is like for us, we are taking up the role of spectator out of <u>need</u>. But we do it also simply for pleasure - or, to put it another way, because we never cease to long for more lives than the one we've got: as participants we only have one life, but as spectators an infinite number is open to us. We read travellers' tales and listen to other people's experiences, we read fiction. We do that in the same sense as we go back from need; in other words, we do it with a sense of what life as a whole is like. We listen to other people with a sense of wonder at what life can do to other people, the possibilities of experience. And all this is really a traffic in values. This idea comes from the British psychologist, Denis Harding[16]., who called the role of spectator 'a detached evaluative role'. Whether we are spectators of actual experience - say a street accident - or of imagined or reconstructed events - as when we gossip about our lives, or read stories or watch plays - we take up this role in order to offer evaluations of what life is like to us and check our evaluations against other people's. The response is detached only in the sense that we are not participating in any ongoing events: we may be thoroughly involved in the story or the gossip.

There's a very famous American linguist called Labov[17]. who has recently brought out, with another linguist, an article on 'Oral Versions of Personal Narratives.' He just stopped people in the streets of New York and asked them silly questions like 'Have you had any trouble with the police?' or 'Have you every been scared for your life?', or 'Have you ever been in danger of death?'. And he got them to talk, and he recorded their stories. Then he made a very careful linguist analysis of the recordings. He found that most of the clauses in/

in the stories were fixed in their serial position - and he labelled these 'narrative clauses'. Then he found that other clauses were displaceable - some over small stretches and some over the whole story. And when he tried to assign a function to these displaceable clauses he decided that they were evaluative. So you've got narrative clauses and evaluative clauses. And he goes on to say that even in this artificial exercise of stopping someone in the street in this way, the essential reason why we like to tell stories of our experiences becomes clear - he finds that any story that has no evaluative clauses and implies no evaluation elsewhere is an 'empty or pointless narrative'. They're not the kind of stories we tell - they sound odd. So in telling stories, we are offering an evaluation of the events narrated and what we want back from our listeners is corroboration or modification of our evaluation. We are trafficking in values. That's why this kind of writing gets to the heart of the problem with the slow learners who are hostile and rejected. And I think it has been neglected as a source of performance in school which can bring linguistic skill. A nice example from Canada: there is a teacher of English in a 'second chance' school there - they can go in at any grade - a splendid institution. But they came in with all sorts of linguistic needs. They wanted to learn to write because they wanted to be policemen, or they wanted to be physiotherapists or they wanted to get into a secretarial college - they wanted to learn to write for this and that reason. And what he did with them was to give them a log of 10 minutes free writing about themselves, about anything they wanted to do, increasingly about themselves as they got to know him, and he told them this writing would not be evaluated. Didn't have its spelling, punctuation or anything evaluated, it was simply a communication to him, a free bit of writing every day. And the way these built up created for him a sudden problem - I am doing this so the boy can learn to spell properly, can write properly so that he can become a policeman. But he has tapped something which is of great importance to him - where do I go now? Well, he went both ways. Over the period of a year he demonstrated to the students themselves that the writing they were doing was meeting a basic need, a basic satisfaction to themselves. And in meeting that satisfaction they were using language to do something they wanted to do, and in doing that they were acquiring control of the skills required in writing. They could then apply these to what someone else wanted them to do.

I'd like to leave this by giving you four points which are not based on what I've said so much as on what I've said and on what is in the report.

First, there is this personal relationship of trust which is emphasised so strongly in the report, and which seems to me to be threatened in all sorts of ways these days, threatened by the failure to reduce class size and so on. I would add to that that if we are getting teachers to trust children we ought to trust teachers. There are occasional signs of a regime of surveillance coming into play to operate against the kind of trust that we need between teachers, and we need between teachers and children. Secondly, this idea of enterprises to lead to success, based on a pupil's intentions and gradually accummulating in units of success. Of course, often the teacher there will be out to show some glimpse of possibilities ahead - being hospitable to the child's own intentions on one hand but also ready to arouse new intentions by showing possibilities ahead. Thirdly, something I would have loved to talk about, but I'm not capable of doing so, and that is the matter of parental involvement. Parental involvement is the heart of the problem of the slow learner. I've been very interested in all sorts of experiments in achieving it. I'm quite certain it's important. The fourth point - this is where I intend to move outside my brief, outside the report - I heard a Dean of Education in a Canadian University saying that change was impossible in the elementary school in Canada. The system was so stable, so conservative that it did not change. If he was talking about change from the top, he was probably right, but change/

change comes by contagion, by contagion from teacher to teacher. We're a long way short of the ideal whereby every school should become a unit of in-service training for all its teachers. That seems to me, as a policy something that in the long run we should be aiming at.

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THE TEACHING OF READING

Donald Moyle

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen, you'll just have to test the atmosphere to see if you're wide enough awake - I got up at four this morning. That's one of my problems - managing to get from one place to another. The whole business of problems, incidentally is something which will occupy at least the first part of our session this morning. Everyone is aware, of course, that we have a problem with reading. No-one has proved it. The evidence for such a thing is really very slim; in fact, Gephart, in the Adult Functional Reading Study in the United States, writes that by popular consensus we have a problem, but in terms of its analysis, we don't know what the problem is mainly because we have no model of where we're going. Gephart, in his introduction to the study, says,

> "We have no objectives. There is no description either empirically derived or philosophically derived which would tell us what were the goals of our reading instructions, what sort of levels should be achieved, and the job descriptions of readers in particular spheres of life."

And so this is one of our starter problems. But the problem, of course, that the newspapers would want us to panic about is our supposed lack of high standards. In national terms, of course, that really is a very small problem, in international terms it's an even smaller one.

Now, we must look at this sort of problem because, you see, if we start from the adult literacy side of the thing, in England we have been surveying the population since the war at regular intervals, and the suggestion would be that in our best year, we produced 3.5 per cent of the 15-year olds who hadn't reached a reading level of nine which at that time was still thought by UNESCO to be the level at which you could suggest literacy had been achieved. And in the worst year, it was 4.1 per cent. Now, those are not really very large figures and certainly don't amount anywhere near to the million and a half of the population of England which people say are illiterate. In fact, there are those who say that three millions have reading problems. One of the reasons why the figure in the adult world may be larger is, of course, that we have not achieved the level at which people can continue to grow in reading. So what happens is that very often the adult or the teenager goes out into society and he finds that there is nothing there to interest him which he is able to read with ease - a few things perhaps which he is able to read with difficulty, but because it is difficult, he doesn't continue with it with any great enthusiasm and eventually he becomes 'turned off'. Then, of course, as a skill that he has been given or partially given isn't used, it gradually goes into decline. Those of you who are old enough, will remember that in 1948 the Picture Post made a great song and dance about this - how the schools had failed to teach young men in the army in their school years to read and the army could succeed in six weeks. And the answer very much, apart from the fact that you might conceivably get shot if you didn't succeed, is probably in this decline problem. In other words, once you learn to ride a bike, you may be a bit shaky when you try some years later, but still, you'll pick it up very quickly. And this might indeed be the case with many of the adults. John Downing has christened this type of adult an "ex-literate" rather than an "illiterate".

One/

One of the things I think we've got to explore, which is very relevant to giving us some guidelines on what we should be doing in schools, is, why we have this difficulty? Why is it that if UNESCO could suggest that a reading age level of an average nine-year old child was sufficient to say a person was literate, why is it that firstly, it isn't sufficient, and secondly, children having reached that standard usually go into decline rather than increase after school life is finished? I think that the first basis for this must be seen in the changing situation with regard to the literacy needs of the adult in society today. For example, you may be aware that the normal householder in Britain fills in up to as many as seventeen times more forms per year than he did in 1939. And generally speaking there are very few forms that can be completed with a reading age less than eleven, we have found.

But there is an interesting other side to this which I can illustrate from some research which I undertook for the Bullock Committee into the readability of British newspapers. In 1949, McLaughlin did his PhD study on the readability of British newspapers and in the intervening years between then and 1972, there was in fact very little work done in this area. And it had become commonplace in our society to say that the Daily Mirror can be read with a reading age of nine, and this was one of McLaughlin's discoveries. Now, in actual fact, the Mirror is still our simplest national daily. It beats the Sun by a hair's breadth.

The Daily Mirror, in its main news section, averaged over every day for a month, has an average reading level of twelve and a half. The leader has an average reading level of thirteen years and what used to be called the 'Woman's Page' - we'd better now call it the 'fashion page' has a reading age of eleven years six months. However, having used McLaughlin's original formulae, we did test this out on actual adults and found that these figures on readability had a lot of question marks about them and so don't take the figures as gospel truth. But as far as we can see, within a certain standard error, that's a reasonable estimate of the standard of the Mirror at the present time. And so, if we are thinking in terms of deciding on minimum levels, the first thing that we've got to do is to up the figures considerably - if your minimum level was nine, when your simplest newspaper was nine, and the simplest newspaper now averages out something like twelve and a half, then we shall need to raise it to twelve and a half. Now these arbitrary decisions are really not on, but it would be interesting to note too, that the average textbook used by children between eleven and twelve in British schools, demands a reading age of at least thirteen, in order to process the content rather than process the words. And there are reasons in the adult world - and possibly in the school world too - for this tremendous increase in reading level. The fact is that we've had an information explosion, and because there is so much more information, so many more value judgements and so forth to be made, then the linguistic structures - and these are really what are measured by readability formulae - also increase. Actually, the conversational style of the simple newspapers makes comprehension more difficult, in actual fact it makes it more difficult because there are insufficient breaks - grammatical structure breaks, particularly with full stops. In fact, the sports page in particular in the Daily Mirror could have it's reading level reduced by eighteen months quite easily with the addition of a few full stops. The compositors appear to have lost them all.

But take one of our simplest government forms, for example, on how to claim for family allowance - the little pamphlet on this has a reading level of around fourteen. But when we come to the section in the pamphlet which tells/

tells you how to fill the form in - it immediately jumps to seventeen. So, what I'm saying really is that the demands in society upon reading are (a) more numerous and (b) at a high level. When I was first a peripatetic remedial teacher, I was given a set of most interesting rules. I won't go through them all because I don't agree with any of them actually, but one of them was, that a child had to be discharged when it reached the reading level of eight and a half years or its own chronological age - whichever was sooner. And my suggestion would be that one of the major reasons perhaps for some of the difficulties later on could well be the frequency with which children had been introduced to reading and then had been dropped from the support which they had become used to long before they were able to develop on their own.

So we have this particular problem at the level that we're going to expect them to reach. But inherent in all the things I've been saying is another side of the reading game. And one I think which has had insufficient attention. And this is why I'm going to spend a major part of my time this morning on this. As you realise, in an hour and a quarter it's very difficult to decide with regard to reading difficulty what one should spend the time on. I'm going to spend the majority of our time on our aims and objectives.

The Bullock Report, if you remember, suggested that in England there was not any actual proof that standards had declined, but there were significant worries. One of the worries was the increasing need of literature, the other was the quality of reading. McMahan did a most interesting study in 1957. He did the first half of it in Britain and the second half in the United States. McMahan suggested that only fifty per cent of our adult population read a single book during the whole of the previous year. Now, there's something wrong here. Certainly books are not the most read things by adults, in fact the highest amount of time spent by the average citizen is on a newspaper. They're read with the highest rate of frequency, considered by the average adult to be most essential reading media and they have the highest time span. Books in actual fact come seventh on the list. But, in actual fact, the average American spends, according to Murphy in the Adult Functional Literacy Study, at least ninety minutes a day in some sort of reading. Not much of this reading is what we would call sustained reading - most of it is the odd half minute here and there - reading road signs and things of this sort.

But the interesting thing about this whole area is the question of why don't they read books? And certainly the amount of reading which takes place does not come up to the expectations when one considers the efforts that we put into it in school. If it's so important to us in school, how come that so many of our adults either find so much difficulty or on the other hand even if they can read to a reasonable extent, they don't bother? I suggest to you that it's the quality of the reading experience that they get in school, which influences this situation. And that, particularly, I want to raise our priorities in this area. For, what we have been producing, according to a most interesting statement by Keith Gardner in 1968, when he apologised for so much of the remedial work he'd been doing on the grounds that looking back he felt that he had spent most of his effort in producing simply what he called "more statistically respectable non-readers". In other words, people who can read, but don't. And we must ask the question why they don't. I suggest that the first reason why they don't is that we have been too anxious in the infant school and even more anxious when we meet failures later in school life.

I suggest that we've got our priorities in thinking about reading the wrong way round. And the first thing we should always think about is the purpose for which reading takes place. Purpose is a rather wonderful thing: if you consider it you will find that there is very little activity in your life which is purposeless. And as soon as you discover it you put a stop to it. In other words, most of the things you do, you <u>decide</u> to do because of some need you feel you have. And we consider, in the school situation, that the/

the child infers or accepts from us a need to learn to read. But consider that Jessie Reid, for example, discovered that sixty per cent of children on their entry to school had no idea what reading was about - how could they feel their need of it? They knew they were coming to school to learn to read, but they'd only got the parlance, they hadn't got the meaning. They didn't know what it was for and they didn't see it as part of their lives. And so if we put them into a skill-getting game with that background atmosphere - they don't know what it's for. The only thing they read for is to please teacher. And although there are worse reasons for working in school, that's not the best. But purpose is more than just a motivator. Purpose is the thing which ensures that the reading occasion will always be a meaningful experience. Purpose will demand that there is an outcome of every reading activity other than simply the mastery of reading skill. Purpose, also, says where skills can be used, and therefore to have read in relation to a purpose with another outcome eases the child's ability to transfer the skills. You will have read no doubt that in the Bullock Committee's report the suggestion was that many highly structured reading materials were not of themselves bad, but that one of their related problems may be this question of transfer - in other words the question of children learning skills, mastering them but not knowing how or where to use them on real life reading tasks. If it doesn't transfer to other tasks when you haven't got a teacher at your elbow, or a power builder card or something in your hand, there isn't much point in having been taught them in the first instance.

But purpose also ensures that there will be a growth of life style in terms of reading and there are only five major reading purposes.

Diagram 1

Reading Purposes

Home and Family
Employment
Consumer
Community
Leisure

} Purpose Areas.

They can all be split down and of course any individual task may come under a number of headings. For example, if you're going to go on a holiday you will need to have some interaction with the whole of the family purpose area, the employment purpose area, and if you're choosing a package holiday, then certainly the consumer purpose area.

The other thing that purpose does is select the media that is going to be most helpful to your reading occasion. I said earlier that media was a worry. The vast majority of reading in schools takes place in one of two situations - either from the children's own written work or from books. I've already said that books are something like seventh in terms of their frequency of usage in adult society but there are many other media which figure very little in a school situation.

Diagram 2

Reading Media - Author Purposes/

Diagram 2

Reading Media - Author Purposes

To entertain	novels, drama.
To inform	encyclopaedias, letters, brochures.
To persuade	advertisements, political pamphlets.
To elicit information	questionnaires, letters.
To proscribe	legal documents, regulations.
To prescribe	instructions.

I suggest that over the years although that's not a terribly good list - for example brochures is a functional title, because a brochure is always trying to sell you something, whereas the pamphlet is not (the pamphlet could be all sorts of things, it simply signifies a small booklet) - but this wide range - for instance, newspapers, highest on the list, cheapest in terms of teaching material, of course if you prefer to use them a day old you can get them for nothing - they very rarely in my experience enter schools as teaching material. And for example, if last year you had been doing a project on Roman Britain, which is a very popular one in junior schools at least, you would perhaps most likely have used one of the arid texts on the subject; if you had studied your national dailies, you would have found that on every other day in one of the ten major national dailies in Britain some new discovery about Roman Britain was mentioned. And so, let's not think that they are too narrow. The other thing about reading media, of course, is that they interact with the skills in terms of their appropriate mental sets, appropriate thinking in relation to materials on the one hand, and appropriate skills in reading them on the other. And if we don't give children a varied diet they may not develop those skills and also of course they may not discover those media which would turn them on so that they can enjoy reading.

You need to think more widely than just the list of media although that can be a good mnemonic, for over a period of time, the child needs to interact with all the different sorts of author purposes and writing styles.

Diagram 3

Reading Media - Writing Style

Descriptive static	house specifications
Descriptive dynamic	car production
Rhetorical inductive	research paper
Rhetorical deductive	philosophical paper
Imperative	legal document
Interrogative	questionnaire
Exclamatory	religious tract

The other area which forms the third part of the reading curriculum is the area of skills. And here again, I think we've thought very, very narrowly about skills. We've tended to think, and an awful lot of reading instruction would lead us to believe, that reading is about words. And reading is not about words - reading is about the inter-action of the experiences, thinking abilities of a reader with the feelings, information, ideas and so on, of an author. So if we take the wider definition, you find that it's important first of all to start back with your purpose and the first thing you've got to do when you're reading, is to decide what you want to get out of it, Now, your purpose may be nothing more than to read a light novel, not to tell somebody the plot the next day/

day, much less to do a character study and appraisal of the style and atmosphere and so on, but simply because it helps you relax and go to sleep more easily. That's quite an acceptable himan purpose - there's nothing terribly utilitarian and functional basically about purpose - it can be enjoyment as well. The thing is that you set the whole business of how you're going to tackle it first. And the first thing you set, especially if you're going into a study reading situation - you're gathering information or something of the sort- are the questions to which you want answers. Incidentally, one of the reasons why children, when they're given topics and centres of interest to do, go to books and copy great chunks out of the books, is because you haven't helped them set detailed enough questions for their reading. They can't process the text, so they say, "Oh, that looks like something to do with it." and they copy the whole lot out. And then you tell them off for not thinking when it may be that you haven't given them the tools to do the job.

Having set the purpose, the next thing to do is to choose the media. Now, I don't know what the ordinary person in society is like at this, but students in colleges and university are atrocious. There's an interesting paper by Perry which describes how 83% of the students at Harvard are inefficient at being able to go to a library and use library systems. But being able to select is very much more than being able to use the mechanical library and index systems. There's an intelligent area to it as well which is the ability quickly to survey a piece of printed language and make decisions as to whether it's in the right area at the right level and is going to be the most useful thing for you. And the techniques of this can be learned quite easily. But I would suggest that very often we don't, at least not in the early years of reading instructions, give our children much opportunity to go out with questions in mind to select their own material from the total range. We sometimes allow them to do it from a very limited range, but not from a total range. Very often we're top frightened that they find something that's too easy or too difficult.

When one has selected the media, the next thing is to decide how you're going to read it. And there are three major ways of reading a piece of written language - and the first is skimming - that's reading quickly to get a general impression, the sort of thing you'd do with that novel last thing at night; the sort of thing you'd do to a political pamphlet not worthy of any deeper introspection. It's interesting with a political pamphlet you can work out a nice system there in order to skip as well as skim, in other words when you get to words such as 'and, also, together, with' you know he's just going to add another illustration to the one he's given, you don't need to read the rest of that. Or if you come to words such as 'but, since, although', you know he's going to contradict himself or have a reservation - the other party will have picked all those out, so you don't need to read those either.

The second method of reading, scanning, is the technique of looking for isolated pieces of information. There are all sorts of ways of doing this and each individual needs to find which is the best one for him. President Kennedy of the States was a highly trained reader. He read by a technique known as 'centre-page scanning' where you read vertically down the middle word of the page and you try mentally to capture in peripheral vision any particular idea on either side which might be of interest. Now I suggest to you that his reading by centre-page scanning of state documents was an inappropriate choice of reading technique - he should have been skimming. And had he been skimming, he wouldn't have made such mistakes as the Bay of Pigs. However, it can be most useful in looking for isolated pieces of information.

The third is study reading. There are a lot of areas in our early reading instructions/

instructions which make it difficult later on for people to study. One of them is a fad which, I'm pleased to say, is declining a little - the Delicato syndrome of left/right orientation. Might I just remind you, that our language is only partially a left/right language. Left/right orientation is not nearly as important as we are sometimes led to believe and an awful lot of wasted time has been spent on it. There is only a general left/right directionality in the English language and in 80% or words it doesn't function. In other words if you're going to look at the relationship as some schemes would have you believe, between individual letters and the sounds they might possibly make, you take a word like 'ceiling': you start with the 'c' you modify it, get to the 'e', and then you have to look back. You have to modify the 'e' when you get to the 'i', so you have to look back again. When you get to the 'l', you have to modify the 'ei' again. But when you study reading in terms of the idea interaction, and thinking about what an author is saying and comparing arguments and seeing if it is logical, you to and fro about the text. The other thing that we do, of course, is teach all our children in their early stages almost entirely from story-book material. Now, it's logical when you're reading a story to start with the first word, read every word through it and finish up with the last one. From a study point of view, rarely ever will a single purpose necessitate you to read a complete book - and not very often will you want to read a book for study purposes in the order in which it has been written.

The next thing, when you've of course got to the reading, is that despite what Frank Smith says about the importance of deep structure, it is quite impossible to read without reading some of the words. Therefore, there must be some inter-action of word identification techniques. Here again, we've been too narrow. We need to think again about what we've been doing. Remember for years we had this tremendous controversy about whether we taught reading by look-say or phonics and some people were foolish enough to try one or the other. Then we had Schonell who said you take look-say first and do phonics later. The interesting thing is that there are in fact four word identification skills. It wasn't the argument between look-say and phonics that was important - the thing that was important was that it drew attention away from the two most important word identification skills which are the use of linguistic knowledge and the use of meaning in text. Because there are very few statements in English that can be recorded in one word, therefore very few words need ever to be read in isolation except for test situations. And as we shouldn't be testing children unless it is giving us information to help us to do our teaching better, there seems little point in doing a lot of work on isolated words. The work should be done in relation to context.

However, the trouble with configuration is that at first you don't know how that word has been memorized, and further, it doesn't very quickly lead to independence in reading. We want a child as quickly as possible to be able to read on his own. You can't recognise a word by whole word approaches unless you've seen it before and somebody's told you what it is. The other problem of course, is the number of words that can be remembered in a given space of time when so many of our words are so similar to each other.

Phonics is the scientific way of reading which is very helpful in some situations just as is memorizing words. Most of the words we read we've memorized, therefore we've got to memorize words. Also, when we come to a word we don't know or we're unfamiliar with, one of the things we use is our phonic skill. So phonics play a part in the word identification process. The only trouble is that all too often, we give children a mistaken impression that there is something very finite about the relationship between sounds and symbols in our language which there patently is not. The question you must raise is whether Chomsky is right in saying there is no relationship at all between the spelling of English and the sound of English? Therefore we shouldn't teach it at all. I would say that we've got to be careful how we teach/

teach it, because I think it still has some value.

The third area is the use of linguistic structures. Now this seems to me something that we haven't thought about very much at all. But even our poorest readers and our youngest children in schools have a tremendous language development. They know an awful lot about their language. For example, if you put 'the dog . . .' and get every child in the class to fill in that last word, even with such a small number of clues you will find that it will be very, very rare that for all the different words that can be put in that space they will all put a verb. It is very rare that anyone doesn't. But, for example, if I say "it" - the next word is? - "is" - seventeen times out of twenty in English "it" is followed by "is". So, sometimes you can actually get to the word, but what you can certainly get to is the function of the word. And children have got this sort of gut-judgement, the feel of the language and we could use it much more in order to produce good word identification.

Normally, of course, language works together with the fourth word identification skill, which is the use of context. This is the intelligent way of reading because the reader is reading for meaning. But it's not foolproof either. There are three possible alternatives that could happen. The first thing is that the child gets the word right and the idea right and everybody's happy. The second thing is that you get the idea right but the word is a synonym or near synonym of the author's original word. And in terms of the meaning of that reading experience, nothing has suffered. But you have a problem. If you allow children to do that, regularly, over a period of time, they'll get exactly the same way as you are with your spelling. You have all, I'm quite sure, got your own personal short-list of words that whenever you write them you're never very certain if you've spelt them correctly, and the longer you look the more upset you get and the more uncertain you get as to whether you've spelt them correctly or not. So, if you're writing for a job, you look the dictionary up and make sure, if you're writing to a friend, of course, you just thicken the strokes and hope they can spell it. But the interesting thing here is that what has happened to you is that you have not learned to suppress the responses that are not appropriate in that situation because you've been allowed over a long period of time to have varied spellings of that word. And the same can happen with children who do such things as read 'little' and 'small' interchangeably - some times they're right and sometimes they're wrong. The third possibility is that you can get the word wrong and the idea wrong and still think you're right. Usually this is a problem more of the young intelligent reader than of the slower learner. The child makes a mistake early on in a sentence, then will come to a word and say, "Oh, that doesn't make sense',so changes that as well and ends up changing the whole sentence and then he's created a new text. Obviously you can't let that go on forever either.

So the important thing I suggest to you is that at all stages in their development, children will need all four word identification skills, although there are times when we may have to emphasise one or the other. I suggest equally that whenever you ask a child to study a word, he should start studying it first of all from the point of view of trying to locate its meaning. Phonic work and linguistic structure then give you the back-up service to identify the word. If you don't do this you are teaching again that reading's about words and words on their own aren't much use.

Then we come to the whole area of comprehension and there's a lot of literature and argument on this over the last year or two trying to decide whether it's one skill or many. The typical American situation was to have vast taxonomies - the most used one in actual fact is the Barrett taxonomy - vast taxonomies of operations which were supposedly related to particular skills. In the Effective Reading Project at Nottingham, the suggestion has been made that there is no such thing as separate skills, that there is only basically a general ability related to a comprehension type ability. However if/

if you don't ask the children to read critically, to evaluate, to make inferences, to read between the lines and beyond the lines as well as on them, you will find that they don't. And if they don't get the practice in school, at the place where they come for their education, where are they going to get it? What they'll do then, of course, is that they'll be completely conned by the newspaper situation where fact is usually presented in a framework of opinion and they won't be able to divorce the one from the other.

Now the other thing about the reading process is this outcome, the development from the reading situation, and there's a development in a number of directions. There's a development in what skills do I need for a future situation, how well did I practise the ones I should have used in this reading situation? There's development also in what meaning have I got, and what does this mean that I've got to do in the future - what other reading should I do, what other thinking did I ought to do and so on. And so there is an action line also which should have been emerging from the reading process. And all these things are related. My suggestion to you is that if they're not related, what happens is that we teach children to read but that they don't read. And there seems little point in putting that tremendous amount of effort and commitment into reading if they're not going to use it. And so, in our society it gets more and more important that we should be thinking more powerfully about these things. But they leave us with two basic problems from an organisation and from a teaching point of view. And if I can just try and illustrate these quickly.

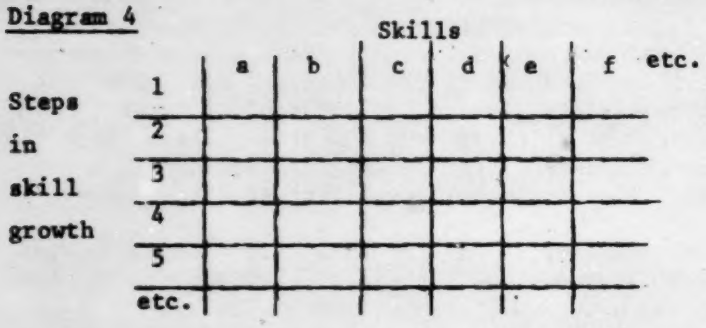
Parker has suggested that all skills develop in a linear manner. What we ought to be able to do is to say reading is composed of x,y,z skills, and we should be able to list them. Each small step following the other. Now, assuming for a moment that that is possible, Johnny comes into school and he's a good lad, he's bright, had a good home background, which provided him with all the background experiences he needs in his language, in order to make a good start on reading. He's got a good teacher, the room is full of appropriate equipment and they've got this master plan for the development of reading carefully worked out. Well, he comes, and he gets on like a house on fire, and then after he's got through stage three, he gets measles, has a couple of weeks off school, and when he comes back, Teacher, of course, knows that everything builds on everything else. So he insists that he has to start with stage four, but Johnny looks at his pals and sees that they're on stages six, seven and so on, and their work seems so much more interesting and Johnny doesn't like this, but Teacher insists. But Johnny works with his head looking over his shoulder - insufficient commitment, rushes his work. But, because it's only a small step in the skill he manages to get through it. But in skill learning, as in most other human learning in order to ensure that it stays there is a certain amount of over-learning necessary. It isn't only a matter of passing the test, it's a matter of bearing it with you for life. And so, he didn't over-learn it at that stage, and when he comes to stage five, he finds the work is too difficult, not quite as easy as it was at stage four, and he begins to slow up. As he begins to slow up he sees his pals getting further down the list, and more and more interesting work going on. And as he goes on, he gets slower and slower and more and more upset. And somewhere eventually down the list, he'll pack up altogether and say, 'I can't do it, it's too difficult'. And you've got a failure on your hands. That's known to the Behaviourists as the 'cumulative deficits hypothesis'. It really is not very much more than common sense, except the basis of argument. You know as well as I do that if you push a child into areas where he can't be successful, eventually he'll turn off, and he'll start to hate books, to hate teachers, to hate school and so on.

The first thing about it is that reading, of course, is not one skill. It's a rather complex mass of all sorts of things, and they're not all skills. There is a lot of knowledge in the reading process; for example, phonics is mainly/

mainly knowledge. A lot of knowledge, a lot of background experience, a lot of types of operations of thinking abilities which need to be organised. The thing is that we would need to have lots of sub-skills so we'd need lots of columns, wouldn't we?

Recently in New York a lecturer said, "I spent fifteen years research on the question of the content of reading, and I'm able now to tell you with considerable assurance that there are eight hundred and forty-nine sub-skills." To which someone replied, "Why don't you make it a round number?" So we've got all our visual and auditory skills, word recognition skills, memory skills, and the comprehension skills and the study skills, planning skills and so on. Now, of course, we've got to decide what should be happening in each sub-skill at each stage, because reading must have a content. It's got to have a vocabulary, it's got to have a growth pattern, it's got to have stories, information books and so on. So what you've got to do is to decide which level each thing is going to have and then you can draw your rows across, like this:

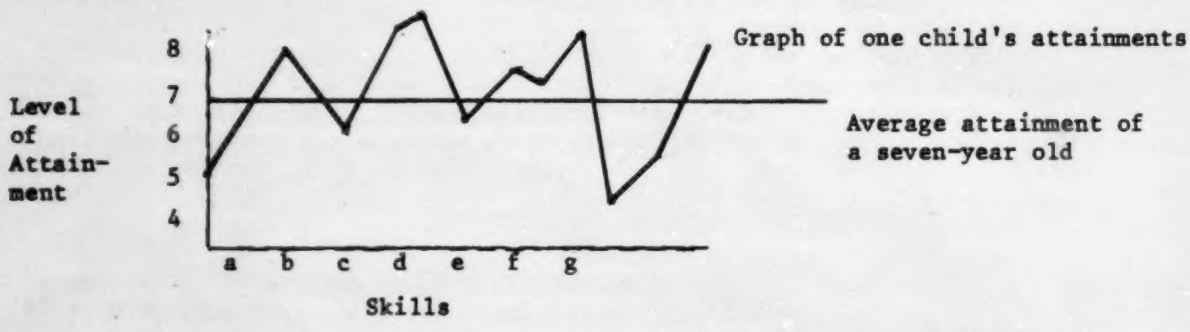
Diagram 4



Now, that's lovely, because then what you can do, you see, is you can devise an activity for each little box and you can get a child to do an activity for each sub-skill at each level and you teach him to go along and when he gets to the end of grade 1 he graduates and goes to grade 2 and so on. Now, that would be wonderful. There's no doubt about it that that's what some of the vast schemes of American material have been trying to do, to try and cover every sub-skill. But as I say, reading has to have a content and therefore when the child's learning a sub-skill he's also memorizing words and so on, so, it makes for a very, very highly structured process that the child must fit into. Now let's have a look at the children. Now, let's say that we're able to take all those sub-skills, and we'll plot them along there and those are the skills, and up here the amount of learning. And let's say that that straight line there is the average level of the seven-year old child in all these sub-skills.

Now, if we test all our children, assuming that we deal only with those that we'll call for the moment average, and we look at their individual profile, we'll find things like this.

Diagram 5



And the strange thing is that up and down pattern of sub-skills in any area of learning in children appears to be normal. And one of the strange things in the reading process is that the average area may have a reasonable equation with how well the child can read in real-life situations, but the skills on which that reading is built may be functioning on very, very different levels. In other words, to achieve the same objective it appears possible to do it from a very, very varied base. So the last thing we would do if we were remedial teachers, of course, would be look at that chart and say, right, he needs help there, there and there. In actual fact, even if you do that, you may find that it makes no difference if you re-test in three months time. Or you may find, of course, if you've put those sub-skills above the line, that all the others you haven't been practising have gone down below it.

Now, the thing is that if you're going to teach from all these skills and you've got to tap them like this, you're going to have to start shoving columns up and down in order to bring them in line and then your content's gone. You really can't do it, however hard you work. You've got to leave something to question. For example, you all know that Book 5 of the Griffen series, Sheila McCullough's Pirate series, is rather a difficult step from Book 4. It may surprise you to know, that Book 5 in actual fact is more difficult to read than Book 6. Book 6 has more words, has longer sentences, but Book 5 is more difficult to read than Book 6. And the reason in fact is the figurative language which is used about the storm, and you find an 11-year old with a reading age of 6 because of the differences in the development of linguistic growth, reads it better than a 6-year old with an R.A. of 7. But you can't do anything from the point of view of moving that series about because 5 and 6 are in a sequence because there aren't 12 books in actual fact, but rather 12 chapters of one story. So you can't shift them about but you can't even shift them about from a vocabulary point of view, because you'd give the child two word learning loads in one book. So you will be in quite considerable trouble - all you can do is to give support and help so that the book doesn't become too much. The other thing is, of course, that this tremendous patterning of the skill areas is not on, because we don't know enough about the nature of skills in order to do it. In other words it's guess work based partly on research but it's guess work in the sequencing of the steps. As far as we are aware, children can learn to read taking all sorts of different routes.

The final thing about doing this box-ticking is the fact that here all too often we make a difficulty for a child and present him with a transfer problem. What we want him to do at the end of the day when he leaves school, when we've done all our work for him, is to be able to look at all the mass of skills, abilities and information and knowledge that he has about reading and be able to select from it what is appropriate for any reading situation. Now the thing is, if he's learnt them in separate little boxes he may never be able to put them together.

In recent years we've had all this money spent on people making kits for visual perception development - and the fact is, you see, that there is no pure visual nor any pure auditory task in reading. And it's not surprising that, having spent these tremendous amounts of money, teachers and researchers have been very disappointed with the results of these kits and programmes because they don't seem to improve reading, except in the cases of some children who have very particular deficits. The real task is sequencing written language which is set out in space to spoken language which is set out in time; and it's the sequencing of these two dimensions of experience which is essential to the child, and there the trouble is more likely to be set out. If we teach our auditory/

auditory and our visual skills separately we are likely never to reach that stage of integration. In other words, we're not teaching one of the basic elements of the process of thinking. Yet you can teach this quite easily by teaching children to read music on the one hand and play a musical instrument on the other. Then not only have you got a sound response to a visual stimulous but you've got a kinesthetic experience in between to tie it all together which makes it all very nice and it works very well. As a matter of fact for the vast majority of children that sort of experience in parallel form elsewhere in life ensures that they master it anyway. But 60% of five year olds are assessed as not having enough auditory-visual sequencing power in order to learn to read. The vast majority of them fortunately in the first two terms in school develop enough auditory-visual sequencing sufficient for reading - by learning to read. The transfer can be a problem and we have got to ensure that we overcome this as much as possible.

I would suggest to you that you can start with a highly structured programme of which you've got to draw out the skills and then show that they're used in a real life situation. You can do it for example with the SRA Reading Laboratories - you've got a structure, not a perfect one, because there isn't a perfect one available, not a total one, because it would make too big a box and they'd be even more expensive than they are. What you have got, however, is a structure of sorts and if you're aware of what it is, you can make fairly good use of it. What they have in it is a very helpful situation where the child can start on a power builder, become interested in the content, and if that's so, you've a 60% chance that the child can have a Pilot Library Book in that same subject area at roughly the same reading level. If there is a book in the Pilot library, then there's a chart showing six or seven books from other publishers - you're usually likely to have another one or two of them in the school - and the child can begin to create out of them a topic centre of interest situation. And this is sort of moving the realism of using those skills across so you can observe them in more realistic situations.

The other alternative, of course, is to start with the total curriculum, and have no set structured scheme which the children are going to go through. You may have structured materials, but you use them for back-up purposes as and when children need them. Now, here, the situation is rather interesting; because what you've done is said that the structure and development, sequencing of learning, is entirely in the hands of the children and teacher. You're taking on a great task if you do and though emotionally I'm orientated very strongly towards this, I must warn you about the difficulties of it. If you don't take somebody else's structure, the first thing you've given yourself is a lot of work. Because you have to make a lot of material, there is no doubt about it.

The second thing, however, is that in order to make that material, in order to supervise the work of the children and then make sure that they do develop and not simply go round in circles doing the same thing day after day, you have got to have a very detailed mental map of what is possible, in terms of steps from where the child is, to an onward step to his growth. Having said that, the next problem is that you need, not only to have the mental map of the process, but you equally need to have the knowledge in such detail of each individual child that you can say exactly what level he's at in all of the skills and so forth that he needs for the process. And lastly, you've got to be there to teach whenever he presents the opportunity for you to do some skill-development teaching. That means very small classes, smaller than what we hope for in the next ten years, and it means a very, very energetic and insightful type of teaching. But if you can persuade somebody to give you a class of 15, that is perfectly possible. We need to have some guidance mechanisms and one possible mechanism is Merritt's G.P.I.D. (Goals, Plans, Implementation and Development). At the planning stage, you've got two elements - the content and/

and the skill. Now the child may have all skills needed, so that's fine, you can carry on. On the other hand, you may know, as teacher, that if you allow him to move forward in his topic, he won't be as successful as he'd have liked to have been, or as you would have liked him to have been, and he may come out dissatisfied, because he hasn't topped up the skills he needs to make an absolute success of it. But at this point you can take him out of the process and use structured materials or do some teaching. The interesting thing is the need for the skill has already arisen because he's working along a goal which he has discussed andunderstood. Having done that, he comes back immediately into his implementation stage and puts that skill into practise in his real life activity which he knows is purposeful.

The following diagram shows a purpose resource grid and using this you can analyse any piece of work.

Diagram 6

Purpose Resource Grid - Coalmining

Purpose	Resource	Sources	Skills
How is coal formed?	Library Museum	Text and Reference Books	Indexing Scanning Interpret. of diagrams Summarising Collating information
What are miners like?	Miners Unions Library	Interviews Union Records Song Books Sociological histories	Transposing spoken to written language Reading between the lines Evaluating differing viewpoints

One of the things that happens in schools is that teachers have forgotton who goes there to work - the children. And teachers, to my mind, do far too much, which prevents children having the independence that they should have. For example, if you were working in topic work, like in this particular area, you might want some information from the Miner's Union. And what would seem normal to me is that the teacher writes for it. The teacher should never write for it - that's the children's job. And she might say, well the material won't be there when I want to do the lesson. Well, they'll have to wait for their information. I don't know if any of you have seen the Open University T.V. film Reading in Project Work with a group of children in Derbyshire, but they found some interesting things in what was basically a letter writing project. But they wrote to every borough and county surveyor in the county at the start of their project, and they got a 97% response - you wouldn't have believed that, would you? They wrote to all the farmers and all the market gardeners in Derbyshire about the use of chemical sprays and found that 93% of the farmers answered and only 2% of the market gardeners. They didn't need to read the letters to decide about what those two parties thought about the use of poisonous sprays.

The last column in Diagram 6 is to itemise the skills - not all the skills wanted in every process, but thinking of the particular child or children involved in the piece of work, which skills may possibly cause him any trouble. You probably wouldn't get as long a list as I've got there, and they would probably in any case be rather more detailed; instead of indexing you might say something like, the child knows first-letter alphabetical order usage in indexing but now it's a bigger index, so he's probably going to have to start using the second and third letters to make sure he's got the right word. You need/

need background planning devices of this sort, and the reason we devised them was because, we not only found they were helpful to us as teachers but we found equally, that children could use them themselves. And so progressively we started them off with just the children discussing them with us, and as the children moved up the school, having done them for a period of time, the reverse came to be true, even in the skills column: the child was filling it in and was coming back to the teacher to ask whether this was OK. And this was a progressive move towards independent learning. You may feel that all this about reading as a thinking process and moving to independent thinking, value judgement, and the relationship of schools to adult society, is a far cry from the remedial situation. The reason why I chose to spend time on it this morning is that I feel that with this sort of qualitative thinking, of what the purpose of it all is, and what we're really trying to do, we shall produce those children through strong teaching, who not only can read, but do.

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COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Joan Tough

We are concerned today with the phenomenon of language, the part that using language plays in children's social and intellectual development and the kind of learning it helps them to achieve at later stages. What I hope will come out of today's discussion is greater insight into the child's dependency on language for much of what he is expected to learn in school and how the on-going dialogue should provide both the medium and the motivation for much of his learning. I put the stress on dialogue - the exchange of meanings between people, the exchange that can go on between teacher and child. How much will be exchanged depends on the teacher's skill and understanding and upon the child's skills, on the limitations on his skills due to the early experiences he has had. For you, who teach slower learners, the origins and development of the child's language to the point at which you see him, must be of great concern because this can alert you to the kinds of problems the child has in meeting your expectations and demands in the classroom. Unless we understand the experiences he has had, the meaning language has for him, the kind of meaning he can express through language, how can we provide the education he needs at these later stages? So, although all our illustrations will be of children of under six, I hope that you will not feel that it will be of no relevance at all for those who teach children of 12, 13, 14, whether they are slow learners or not. The question must be relevant to anyone who is taking part in education.

I know that much of the week has been referring to A Language for Life. As I looked over your draft-document this morning, I realised that there was much reference to that, that this course is in fact the setting for discussion of the Bullock Report. The title chosen for the report is interesting; it indicates that in the Committee's opinion language is something more than something you just have to learn in school - it's something more than just literacy. It actually is concerned with a way of living, with what you can take from life. Our understanding of the phenomenon of language is set against a background of research. Perhaps I can sketch in how I came to study language.

I originally came to look at language as I moved from a school in a town in Yorkshire which was a residential area for one of the big cities. A school with a mixed population; mixed in that it was drawn from different sections of the population. And I moved from that school into a very large school that served a large housing estate built on the edge of the city. And this was my first hard lesson, for things that I prepared that had gone well and brought responses from children in the school in which I had spent several years now didn't bring the same response. I had not changed in the weeks between, although I was perhaps not so much in tune with the children in the school to which I had come. But try as I would, I was not able to get the kind of response that I'd been used to before. One of the things that impressed me at the time was the difficulty of exchanging information, communicating with the children in this top infant class. I provided good concrete materials, many things to do, materials and objects to use in ways that I thought would aid their learning. These experiences had always worked before, but the dialogue between myself and the children was so different that I had to stand back and ask myself - why? Is it something about me? Is it something about the children? Is it something about both?

When I moved into teacher training, in the same area, this also struck me quite forcibly - that those students I placed in schools on one side of the city, in the so-called good residential areas, met with a very different response from those students I had put on the other side of the city in schools that served/

served large municipal housing estates. The problems that students had with infants and juniors were not problems of discipline or management. It was a question of stimulating a response, knowing how to spark off and keep dialogue going, how to draw out in dialogue what children were learning. Sometimes I thought if I could just change the students round in the middle of their practice it would completely change the kind of profile they would show. It was never possible to have a situation that was equal for all students.

That experience also headed me towards looking at why children should respond so differently to their experiences in school. This was about the time when Bernstein's research began to come to the fore. Earlier than that research had begun to show that, despite the 1944 Act and the intention to provide equal opportunities for all, there is still a great difference between the benefits different sections of the population take from education. The section of the population that benefits most from education is the one in which parents have already benefited from education - we can refer to social classes but social class is surely also a reflection of the kind of education people have taken, the kind of skills they have developed and therefore of the occupation they follow. For us it seems to make better sense to look at the educational background from which children come, the education of the parents, in order to understand why children should have different experiences in their early years. There is a section of the population that takes much less of value from education than other sections. Your own children are perhaps not doing quite so well as you had hoped they would do - we have our problems in bringing up our children - but, nevertheless, the chances that they will go through school on to higher education are much greater for them than if your child came from the home of a farm labourer for example. There is an accruement of the benefits of education that is handed down to children through the kind of experiences they have with their parents.

Bernstein's research and others' research in the same field began to show some association between the way in which people used language and their social class background. This research on the whole used terms that related to the structures of language they were using. For example, the measures used are concerned with the length of utterances, the use of pronouns instead of nouns, the extension of the verb. There's also evidence that when children achieve well in areas of traditional school learning this is associated with ability in using language.

These then were the background experiences that brought me to look at language. As a result of my experiences I was asking why language should matter in education? What is it we should do if we are to improve what many children take from education? Is there a linked association between doing well in school and the way in which children can use language? I was very naive, I think, in trying to set up a piece of research that would look at this question. We selected a group of children from homes where one or both parents had had higher education and earned their living, one or both, in a profession, for example, as teachers and doctors. The other group of children came from homes where parents had had the minimum of education, who had left school at 14 or 15, had not anything to show in the way of educational achievement and where one or both parents earned their living by following a manual, unskilled or semi-skilled job. It was deliberately done to contrast these two groups to see if one could follow the development of any differences. I was being very naive in hoping that we might observe the important differences developing. We thought that if we took children at three, we should actually be able to trace the differences. We thought that if we started with children at three they were so little on the way to establishing their language that differences would not have developed. We thought we would be able to spot differences as they emerged at five and seven years old and describe the way in whioh those differences had developed. The intention then was to take children at three and/

and to follow them through to looking at differences as they emerged.

So that any differences emerging should not be attributed to basic intelligence, we started off with groups of children who seemed to be in about the same intelligence range and the mean IQ was about the same. We asked teachers in nursery schools and infant schools to introduce us to parents who had children about three who were talking fairly readily. There is not much point in looking at children's language if they are not willing to talk to an observer. Children who do not talk readily do not necessarily have problems in developing language. This is more likely to be one of making relationships. We asked for friendly children who would talk to us and we asked for children whose speech was intelligible enough to transcribe. The selected groups turned out to be quite bright with a mean IQ of around 125, both groups ranging from about 110 to more than 140 on a Stanford-Binet Test.

We decided to record the language of these three-year olds in a situation where they would be happy and willing to talk and not be dependent on interpreting the questions of an adult. In other words what we wanted to see was what they had learned about using language; what they would turn to any situation, what their disposition to use language was at that point. We used a situation in which they played with a chosen companion. They used play materials that were stimulating and interesting, and their talk was recorded for as long as they would go on talking or for as long as our tape would run, which was an hour. All the children stayed at least three quarters of an hour and most of them were still playing away, talking happily, at the end of the hour. So we recorded more than 60 three-year olds. The adult tried to play a neutral role and stepped in only if disputes seemed likely. The adult did not stimulate by asking questions and trying to probe to see what the children could do at this age.

We saw these children again when they were in the infant school at the age of five and a half and again at the end of their infant school period or at the beginning of their junior school when they were seven and a half. At those ages we used interview situations, different kinds of situations designed to provoke particular uses of language. This included some talk with a friend about a task they were doing together.

This is the research that is the background to the Schools Council Communication Skills in Early Childhood project. I expect many of you have experience of your own children when they were three year olds and will have watched children's development of language as I have. Yet when we started looking at the language of three-year olds there were surprises. I was surprised to find how little I had appreciated what was happening as the child developed language.

You can see from the videotape example we have shown, that three-year olds have learned a good deal about the system of signs we call language. If we had looked at younger children, we would have seen that although they were beginning to use signs, and were communicating with adults, the adult needs to project all the time into their problems of using language. Two-year olds are not able to communicate much with each other. When we look at these three-year olds talking together, we can see that they can use the system of signs to communicate with one another. What they say to each other brings a meaningful response from the other child. These children were making some mistakes, for example, in agreements, maybe a plural, or the -ed instead of the irregular past tense; but they were using a whole range of constructions of the kind used by adults. The reason we show you the recorded example of three-year olds is to bring out the first thing that we discovered, that most children at three are quite far along the road to using language as adults use it. It's quite amazing to think that at two years - think of your own children - two years three months usually, they are still at the stage of putting one or two words together/

together, in what's referred to as a telegraphic form. "Daddy go", "Want dolly", that is a two word utterance without the embedding features. So within nine months or twelve months these children have accomplished much and mastered a wide range of structures of the language. Perhaps not all children have gone so far but certainly all children within our groups had, whether or not they came from an educationally advantaged home or not. Remember that I am talking about an educationally advantaged group: in other words, children whose parents are in the professions are known to have advantages within school. It is likely that the child is more in tune with the teacher's expectations than if he comes from the home of parents who have had a minimum education. (We use the terms disadvantaged and advantaged to refer only to advantage or disadvantage in school) The child who comes from the manual worker's home is likely to be at a disadvantage in school. We didn't know whether they would actually be at an advantage or disadvantage when they came into school.

The first finding then was that all our children had established language that was very similar to adults' in construction. Only one child said me instead of I, me do it instead of I'm going to do it. Some of the children in our groups had articulation difficulties, but this is very different, they could not, for example, articulate r's or l's or f's. Children's difficulties were not too distorting in the selected groups because we had asked teachers for children that we would be able to understand. In the general population there may be more problems of articulation amongst three-year olds than there were in the selected groups. There were no differences between the groups in the amount of recorded talk. This might have been because we had only friendly children who would talk.

Where were the differences then? First of all, maybe, I should say that at three and five and seven we confirmed all that Bernstein's research had found. When we examined the language used by children in linguistic terms, by measuring the length of their utterances, by looking at the complexity of the noun, by looking at the complexity of the verb, then we could see wide gaps between the two groups. There was a clear difference in length of utterance and in the elaboration of the verb, in the elaboration of the noun by using adjectives. It never was the case that any of our children who were educationally disadvantaged could not use a long utterance or use an elaborated verb or use an elaborated noun. All the children at some time used elaborate constructions. It was not that they knew fewer constructions, but that they used particular constructions much less frequently than the educationally advantaged groups. How important is it that children should use longer and more elaborate utterances? Is it not possible to express the same ideas in a way that does not involve such elaboration?

We looked at the purposes for which children use language to see whether this would give additional insight. We will illustrate this by referring to the language of the children recorded when they were three;years old. The play materials included toys that would appeal to boys and girls and a number of novelties that would appeal to any child. The materials were set out on a small table. The children had the freedom of the room and the microphone was centred so it could pick up their voices from any part of the room. The transcription gives part of the talk of two three-year old boys, Stephen and Mark. They had picked up cars and were playing down on the floor, talking to one another about what they were doing. Stephen is holding his car and he's saying "Turning it round, turning it round". "Don't want this one" says Mark, "It's broken. Here's the tipper coming" he says, pushing it along, "It's coming now". "Where's the tipper?" says Stephen, as he looks up. "Yes, it is", in agreement that it is a tipper. "Push it over here."

Mark pushes the car over to Stephen and says, "Get this Stephen. Get it. You/

You crash it, crash it."

"Crash it with the tipper" says Stephen in agreement.

Mark says, "Fetch it on there, look!"

Then as Mark's pushed off his tipper, Stephen moves to go and pick it up and Mark very quickly says, "No, no! You can't have it. That's mine." Stephen says "Police car coming er-er, er-er." Lots of noise as this play builds up around the floor, both children joining in. "Send it over here" says Mark.

Talk like this could be found in the conversations of all of the children at three. Although this talk is at a simple level, it illustrates that a great deal has been learned about the use of language. The children are commenting on their own activities and using lnaguage a great deal for controlling their own activities, almost as though at three, children are telling themselves what they're doing. It is almost as though to be alert and aware of what is happening, the three-year old needs to be talking about it. The young child talks in this way so much, almost as though he is telling himself what his arms are doing, or directing his arms. As adults we no longer use language much for this sort of activity now. But try to remember when you learnt some new physical skill, you will probably remember that you broke it down into stages and told yourself how to do it. When I was learning to drive, first my husband told me what I ought to be doing, then I gave myself instructions. After some time the routine is so well practiced that there is no longer a need to give attention to the motor control. But let something go wrong, crashing the gears or pulling out to overtake when it is not clear, then I begin to talk myself back into a place of safety, telling myself what I should do. If I have an intricate task to do, that I haven't done before, then I begin to focus my attention on my fingers and tell my fingers what it is they must do. I don't always talk out loud, I've learnt not to do that. But I'm still in fact instructing myself inside. And in any time of difficulty talk emerges and I become very much like the three-year old, talking out loud to myself.

We should note that at three-years old children are doing this, using language to control their action and coordinate it. Children need to talk out loud to themselves when they are carrying out physical tasks. If we restrict them then we may prevent them practising control over their actions and we may put an intolerable burden on them or prevent them using language for this purpose. It may be the same when we ask six-year olds and seven-year olds to read silently to themselves; it seems to me that maybe they can only master the mechanics of control if they're talking out loud to themselves as they work.

Not only do the children instruct themselves, they also instruct each other and they build up collaboration. As soon as the child's position is threatened or his possessions are taken by other people, then he springs to his defence. All the children in both groups told other children what their rights were and established possession and ownership.

Even in this first conversation children were doing quite a lot with language then. But this second conversation illustrates some important differences between the two groups. As we look at them we can consider whether, if the differences continue to develop, they are differences that could affect what children might take from school. It is perhaps appropriate also to think about this in relationship to slow learners. At three-years old these differences are being established. Although conversations like the first could have been found in the talk of any of the sixty or so children we were looking at, conversations like this second example could only be found in the recorded talk of those referred to as educationally advantaged. Some of the children in the other group did use some language of this kind, but altogether there was very little. We/

We will look at the conversation:

"No, no it's mine, 'cos I'm playing with it", says Steve.

"Well, I can too, it's not yours really."

"But I'm playing with it now - It's a tractor."

Now those first three utterances illustrate one of the differences. Although all children had learned to claim their possessions, these children from the educationally advantaged homes seemed already to be oriented towards justifying their claim. "No, it's mine 'cos I'm playing with it", "Well I can too, it's not yours really", "But I'm playing with it now - it's a tractor". So the child is trying to justify why he's claiming it. There is something else involved here. There is a recognition by both children that there is some difference between owning something and having possession of it. It is a simple principle that many parents establish, that if the object in question really belongs to the child we will support his claim, but if another child owns it then possession means first turn before allowing others to have it. It doesn't mean that young children can always accept this but they know it so well that they quote it to each other. Not only are these children learning that behaviour must be justified or explained, but they are learning to look for general principles to guide behaviour.

We will look at the next part of the conversation..

"It's got big wheels, but it hasn't got a top on it" says James.

"It's a seat, look" says Tim, "where the man's to sit on the seat."

"I've got him" says James. "Let me put the man on the seat. See he fits on."

This too is typical of the group. It may not seem important in the context of play with a toy tractor, but there is skill involved in reflecting on what someone else has said. It is almost as though the child says, "What does it mean? Is he right? What is my experience? I must examine what has been said and check whether the other person is right". This checking activity is characteristic of the group referred to as educationally advantaged and they were doing it as they played with one another. What does this mean for the child in school? It means that as teachers offer experiences the child is orientated to check and examine. They are taking the experience inside themselves to make it a part of their own thinking.

The next part of the conversation was also characteristic. The children were talking about tractors and it is almost as though the child says "Can I add anything more?" If we did not feel like this when we are talking to one another, we should never engage in conversation. We must feel that we want other people to be interested in what we have to say. This kind of motivation leads Tim to say "Well, I've seen a digger and it had bigger wheels than a tractor!" So we had 'tractor' with 'big wheels' and then an association of other things that have big wheels. But see where this takes James who is similarly motivated to say something that will impress his listener. He is listening and checking and making associations with his own experiences and says, "I did, on the big, big road, I saw two big ones digging. They were bigger than a tractor but they didn't have wheels, they'd er - long-er rolling things". But Tim has now stopped listening and is developing his own play "The tractor's going on the road, it's going fast, the man's driving it fast". It does not seem to matter to James that Tim is no longer listening. Perhaps he is quite unaware/

unaware of this. Piaget has shown that the child of three, four and five does not necessarily need an audience for his talk. He talks to himself in a monologue that seems to begin addressed to an audience but then becomes talk for himself. He becomes his own audience. So James goes on: "Big as a bus, I sawed one as big as a bus, and there were some big rocks - a lot - and it was pushing them away to make the road". Now if you're orienting, or disposed to make that sort of connection with something that has been said, or if that leads you to conjure up a picture of some experience which must then be represented in language for others or yourself to consider, see what an exercise you make for yourself. It seems to be an important way in which language serves us. The experiences we have had in the past accumulate and can be made almost to re-occur through the use of language, not with the same kind of intensity as they did originally, but in such a way that they can be re-experienced and re-flected upon so that further meaning unappreciated until then can be drawn from it. These three-year old children were doing just that. It seemed that almost anything would stimulate them to recall and represent some ideas that came from their past experience that had some relevance for the present activity. The present experience it seems is enhanced, becomes different, because of the new experience that has been added through the use of language. So that even playing with toy tractors, pushing them about on the floor, becomes a different experience if other experiences are added to it. Play is given another background, another context because the child has examined past experience, picked out something that is relevant and appropriate and then re-represented it through the use of language.

Talking out loud to oneself seems to be a necessary part of their development at this age. Should we regard the child who does not seem to talk to himself in this way as one whom we ought to be concerned about? How does the child learn to talk to himself in this way? He does not talk to himself in this way in the early stages. Perhaps it is the dialogue that he has with other people that leads him to treat himself as an audience. It is the social necessity for talk, the need to communicate with other people, that builds up skills of using language. Having done this the child then begins to treat himself as his audience. Once that has begun the possibilities for reflection begins. Until you can play the part, both of representer and receiver of ideas, then perhaps you cannot set up an internal debate, the internal debate that we so often assume is going on when we ask children to think about some topic or problem.

To return to the conversation. Tim has begun imaginative play: "The tractor's going on the road, it's going on fast. I'll make it go to the farm. Let's put this thing on to pull something. Let's put a load on it and I'll pull it." "Yes", says James, "Let's put grass on it, no the man's putting grass on it - he's putting grass on it in the field." "Hay you mean" says Tim. "Well it is grass. They take it to the farm and then - and then it's hay" he said.

Perhaps there was an awareness of a point of disagreement here. Had we been acting as teacher we'd have popped in and said, "Well, come on, let's talk about this for a moment. When does grass become hay - is it really because it's in the field or at the farm? What really happens to grass to turn it into hay?"

The children go on with the play - James joins in.

"Taking it to the farm, going to the farm" says Tim.

"I've got the fire engine" says James, "Make it get on fire".

Then/

Then Tim says, "It doesn't matter if it all burns up if nobody wants it any more - it doesn't matter then."

"It's all burning" says James. "The farms burning all up."

"No" says Tim, "don't burn the animals - don't burn them - not the animals. Don't want them to get burned up."

"Get out of the way" says James. "Get out of the way. You'll get knocked down."

James is made of sterner stuff as we can see. But reflect for a moment on what they're doing. Many would dismiss it as just play. But what are these children doing through their play? They're enjoying themselves clearly. Children engage in this kind of activity even when there's nothing else taking their attention because it is rewarding. Tim and James are building up a scene for their play. First of all they're putting grass on the tractor and then making their tractor go to the farm, and the farm gets on fire, and they react to it almost as though the fire was actually taking place. Tim says, "It doesn't matter if it all burns up if nobody wants it any more - it doesn't matter then". He projects this imagined experience and reflects on the consequences of a fire at a farm and says "Don't burn the animals! I don't want them to get burned". This kind of thinking seems to have much of the quality of that demanded in school at later stages when children are asked to think about conditions in the past or in other parts of the world. How much of learning at later stages in school are dependent on the child being able to project through the imagination and consider something not actually ever experienced? Is the basis of such thinking being set up even at the age of three?

But not all the children were able to project in this way. The children in the group seen as at disadvantage in education were not reflecting this kind of thinking in their talk. Their play remained at a level of renaming and actions represented the part they were playing. These differences in play between children suggests that they are also the result of different experience in the home. Those parents who help children to play in this way are establishing in them a disposition to develop play in this way, and at the same time children are motivated to think and use language in this complex way.

These then were the differences we found. We have listed them as follows:

All children use language for:

protecting their own rights and interest and maintaining their own comfort and pleasure

initiating and maintaining relationships with others

reporting on present experience

directing their own and other's actions

But the children from enabling homes seem to have developed the following uses much more extensively than the disadvantaged children:

reporting on past experience

collaborating towards agreed ends

projecting into the future, anticipating and predicting

projecting and comparing possible alternatives

seeing/

seeing causal and dependent relationships

giving explanations of how and why things happen

dealing with problems in the imagination and seeing possible solutions

creating experiences through the use of imagination, often making a pepresentation through the symbolic use of materials

justifying behaviour

reflecting upon feelings, their own and other people's

The major points we would make are as follows:

The differences are not so much differences in children's knowledge of the language system but differences in the purposes for which they use language. The children described as advantaged have learned to use language in this way not because they have been taught about language, but because their parents and others have themselves been using language for these purposes and have drawn their children into using language in the same way. That is, their experiences of using language have led them to develop different dispositions towards using language themselves.

What implications does this have for us in school? First, that we must examine the experiences of using language we are offering to children when they come to school. Can we, by the way in which we talk with children, by the way in which we encourage them to talk as they play and follow their activities, help them to develop ways of thinking and using language that are essential for later learning?

Second, are our own skills of talking with children, and our attitudes towards children such that we can foster a wider range of skills of thinking and using language quite deliberately in the classroom?

These are the questions that the Schools Council Communication Skills Project is examining with the help of many groups of teachers.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND TO SLOWER LEARNING

Tom Meenagh

What is the connection between the slower learner and his social and economic background? I draw most of my own answers to that question from Born to Fail, the National Children's Bureau pamphlet published in 1973, and drawing its statistics from the National Child Development Study which follows the progress of a cohort of children born in the week beginning 3rd September, 1958.

Born to Fail sets out three major types of disadvantage:

1. Family composition. The disadvantage here is of two kinds: a) membership of a family with a large number of children or b) membership of a one-parent family.

2. Low income, estimated simply on the basis of a family collecting supplementary benefit or receiving free school meals.

3. Poor housing. The family lives in over-crowded conditions and/or inhabits a house with no hot water. (It is noteworthy that the definition of "over-crowding" does NOT include a family of two parents and four children living in a two-bedroomed house).

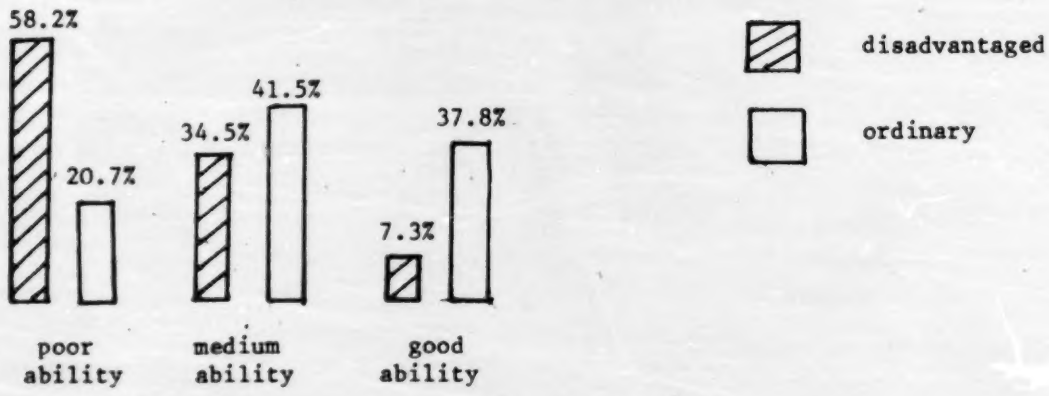
Children are described by the survey as disadvantaged only if they are subject to ALL THREE difficulties.

Such children make up 6.3% of the population, or one child in sixteen. Unhappily, when regional statistics are taken, the figure for Scotland emerges as one in ten. There are, of course, areas of Scotland which represent the British average of one in sixteen. But there are others, particularly in the urban West, where the figure of one in six would be more realistic.

These children are much more likely to be vulnerable at birth, to have ill-health, to be smaller, to share a bed with a bed-wetting sibling, to be taken into care, to have chronic ill health in the family or to have a father who is unemployed for most of the time.

How do these children fare in reading? Figure 1, drawn from Born to Fail provides an answer. Sixty per cent of the disadvantaged children are of poor ability in reading against 20% of non-disadvantaged children. (But notice that 7.3% of disadvantaged children are good readers.)

FIGURE 1



Let's now look at how this applies to an intake of 300 pupils which is fairly normal in Scottish schools. Suppose you are in an area where the Scottish average figure for disadvantage (one in ten) applies. Thirty of your pupils will be disadvantaged. Sixty per cent of these (18 of them) will be poor readers. If you take 20% of the remaining 270 who are not, technically, disadvantaged but are of poor ability, you get 54 pupils. A total of 72 pupils in your intake will be poor readers, 18 of whom, one pupil in four, are severely disadvantaged socially and economically. In an area where one child in six is disadvantaged, 50 children in an intake of 300 will be so. Thirty of these (again 60%) are likely to be poor readers. If 20% of the remaining 250 are poor readers (i.e. 50 children, it means that three out of every eight children that the school is likely to classify as being in need of special help are severely handicapped in social and economic terms.

One more set of statistics is worth looking at (Fig. 2). This again is taken from the National Child Development Study but this time the Figures are worked out by R. Davie in his Eleven Years of Childhood in 1973. The social class categories are those of the classification of the Registrar General.

FIGURE 2

	Reading Score			
Social Class	0–12	13–19	20–35	
I and II	12.0%	37.5%	50.5%	100
III (Non-manual)	15.7	40.8	43.5	100
III (Manual)	32.2	43.7	23.1	100
IV	41.8	40.4	17.8	100
V	52.2	35.6	12.2	100
Total of sample	29.5	40.9	29.6	100

To take the extreme case first, it is noticeable that whereas only 12% of children aged 11 in social classes, I and II (by and large the commercial and the professional classes) had a reading score between 0 and 12, 52% of social class V had: while on the other hand 50% of social classes I and II had an advanged reading score of 20-35, only 12% of social class V had. And this interpretation is supported by an examination of social class III where there are striking differences between the attainment of children of non-manual and manual workers, the latter having more than twice the number with a low reading score. The evidence is that the slow learner as measured by his reading ability comes preponderantly from the working and lower working class. This applies equally to measured ability in number and IQ.

But that is only part of the picture, and it is the negative part. In 1942 Schonell found a direct relation between the percentage of poor performers and the grade of the school as classified Good/Average/Poor. The poorer you were in ability and social status, the poorer the school you were likely to attend. The finding of the National Children's Bureau contradicts this, admitting there are poor schools around but saying that these are as likely to be attended by the more advantaged as by the disadvantaged. The disadvantaged tended to be in smaller classes than the advantaged - although we all know the kind of segregation this implies.

According/

According to Wedge and Presser in Born to Fail, the disadvantaged even within the statistics weighing against them demonstrate a remarkable resilience and toughness:

(a) They had and made as much use of parks, fields and recreation grounds.

(b) They had less access to swimming baths and public libraries but half of them used the public library at least sometimes.

(c) Their hearing and speech was more likely to be defective in some way (1 in 35 had defective hearing as against 1 in 140 for advantaged children) but while 1 in 6 suffered from defective vision, this was no worse than for advantaged children.

(d) But most interesting of all was a measure of how the disadvantaged coped with their difficulties psychologically: 1 in 2 were well adjusted compared with 3 in 4 of normal children; and 1 in 4 were maladjusted compared with 1 in 11.

These statistics give proportions to what many teachers have felt: how well many disadvantaged children appear to cope with daily disasters that would floor the rest of us.

"Timothy Winters" has become hackneyed. (Although as a wise critic once said, it is not a poem but its readers that become hackneyed). Children still like it, because Timothy is a rebel, he's against teachers and they like to feel sorry for him. They don't however get the irony of Timothy's charity.

"And when, at prayers the Master helves
For those less fortunate than ourselves
Timothy Winters says 'Amen'
So come one angel, come on ten
Amen, O Lord. Amen Amen."

Nor to judge by their staffroom gossip do many teachers.

How do our disadvantaged pupils fit into school? As badly as Timothy: "Who shoots down dead the arithmetic birds"? As badly as Billy Caspar? Working class children in middle class schools? Eric Midwinter says: "No wonder that working class children fail to get on according to the law of averages, smarting as they do on the raw edges of a clash of cultures" (Projections: An Educational Priority Area at Work, Ward Lock, £1.00).

All the evidence is that they fit in rather badly. "Those rats in 3C" as one of my colleagues used to call them. "My job is to keep order so that my teachers can get on with their job. I'm a peacekeeper", as my former head used to say. He was a peacekeeper, in the Western sense the lawman, and I was, quite literally, his deputy. So I know. They fight, They break glass. They throw eggs. They put first year bags down the toilet and defecate on them. They bring Carlsberg Specials to the school party. They get pregnant. They run away and sleep up closes. They kick each other and sometimes, tragically, kill each other. That's on the social level.

At the educational level there are as many grave reservations and, of course, their language is inadequate: it's in a restricted code - it's particularistic instead of universalistic and they don't use the subjunctive.

I have tried to present some factual evidence for the real harshness of the lives of many of our pupils - broken homes, overcrowding, real poverty, and to show that their maladjustment shows in those who can't take it.

I/

I believe that the culture that this "other half" of our pupils comes from has not been sufficiently explored by any of us or looked at in a sufficiently positive light. (I am equating slower learner, backward pupil and disadvantaged pupil).

They have access to a speech code that prizes and embodies directness, brevity, metaphor, humour and expressiveness. We know - we've all suffered from it at some stage. The young teacher is in some command of his elaborate code; the pupil is an artist in his and comes from a culture that prizes that artistry. I once asked a farm-boy why he had a hole in the toe of his boot. The instant answer came from the class illiterate: "He's been kickin coos, sir.".

He has a strong sense of self which comes from social allegiances constantly restated and reinforced in speech and behaviour. He generally knows who he is and who his pals are. Participation, comradeship, a vague but comforting "we are the people" solidarity. The newspapers know this and sell it; the schools seem to run, so often, slap-bang up against it.

He has an easiness and assurance of emotional response - loyalty, admiration, love, lust, compassion, contempt, hatred. Violence from others and from us he meets with stoicism and even indifference. Our young hard men are hard. Their open courage in the face of authority would win plaudits in other contexts.

I've mentioned three elements just a bit foreign to (or a bit forgotten by) most of us here: language skill, social solidarity, openness of response. There are also elements of a tangible culture alive (or half alive) which are equally largely disregarded by us. These elements include:

1. Anecdote and description. Jokes of course, real and made up. Everything from abundant relish to horror and revulsion. Crudity from the boys and gossip from the girls. I know this narration is exploited as a substitute for learning by some teachers and I deplore this, but is it ever used positively?

2. Sport in all its aspects popular and exotic. Football, yes. But pigeon racing, dog racing, stock car racing, all-in wrestling, boxing. Sport, and its inevitable accompaniment -

3. Gambling. Cards, "pitch and toss", the bookie's shop. A whole language, a mythology, a literature even. I know because I was brought up on it. Which is probably why like you and every other teacher in authority I'm dead against it. Perhaps we're right. But it's there and it's real. It supports huge industries. In school it's taboo.

4. Music. Well, "folk" is OK and pop keeps the girls happy. But what of the music that so many of our pupils make and that teachers never hear about - accordions, brass band instruments, bagpipes and, yes, guitars. Some schools know this and rightly draw on it. Others still "back" Gilbert and Sullivan. Too many others.

5. Creature comforts. Leisure, food, sleep, warmth and cosiness. These are real working class values. They matter. They make life better. They don't go well with homework, duty, ambition or even social conscience. But they too are there.

I left out booze and so, too, do the schools. (Alright. we do discuss it sometimes in "O" grade and "Tam o' Shanter" gets an occasional airing.).

6. Romance and fantasy. The Western novel. James Bond. Kojak. Mainly via/

via "the tele.". Our Glasgow working party on the media has recently discovered how sophisticated and articulate children are about their viewing.

7. Hero Worship. Occasionally high hero-worship. Football stars and pop stars we accept. But what about Burns; what about Christ? Burns remains a hero in working class culture. People know his works, recite them, sing them, love them uncritically. They sit for hours at Burns Suppers listening to interminable and boring speeches about him. And while the churches may not be overcrowded, and while ministers and priests may not be cult figures, there continue to be powerful religious feelings with Christ as a symbol of the good man at their centre. Are Burns Suppers and religious conversions and political Damascus roads purely adult affairs? I do not think so.

There is a unifying hero type behind all this. He is Ulysses: the ragged wanderer, the cunning, resourceful, amoral, hedonistic adventurer who gets home eventually by persistence and resilience. The stereotype is Andy Capp; the current P.R.O. man and bard, Billy Connolly. Burns assembled their eighteenth century equivalents in the "Jolly Beggars" and Arden the current lot in "Live Like Pigs". I'm suggesting that our pupils, especially our so-called slow learning pupils share a culture out of school that is alive and real, that grows and changes creating its own dramas - and its own satisfactions. On a visit to the local, what's the request? Lord Byron's "Dark Loch Nagar"? It's as alive now as in the 30s. So too is "Flower of Scotland" - which I personally regard as nasty a piece of propaganda work as ever was - but it's clever. It speaks. And so is "lapped up".

What, then, should English teachers, all teachers, do about recognising and exploiting the actual culture of the majority of their pupils including the slower learners?

1. Develop and exploit the language potential of our pupils giving this work a very high priority. Accept the idea that the everyday speech of our pupils has all the sophistication of grammar, tone, vocabulary that makes it a powerful cultural medium. We seem to become bogged down immediately in the whole question of accent and dialect - why are we so little concerned to develop the speech of our pupils?

But all this is to speak abstractly. Speech develops casually before it gathers itself for semi-public and public performance. So the atmosphere of the class and the work of the class must be socially directed to a large extent. I really cannot develop this whole theme now other than to say that this involves some of the following: looking at things(often and in detail; and learning to look at things); bringing things to school; going out of school; noting things within and outside of school to be discussed; inviting people to the class; getting things on tape; working towards public occasions - class evening for parents; exhibitions for class gala days etc.

Eric Midwinter in a little booklet, Social Environment and the Urban School, WLE, 35p, has charted the details (with a syllabus and concrete exemplars) for a fully developed community school.

Speech should be used. It should, where it is worthy of it, be recorded and appreciated as dialogue/anecdote/playlet based on real life incidents. It should also be practised socially in varying contexts.

One of these contexts I believe should be the time-honoured one of dialectic question and answer, "How do you know that?" "Prove it." "But then what would you do?". There are two things here for the teacher in the normal/

normal classroom situation and I believe that they are both very difficult.

(a) talking with the pupils either as a class or as a group. When to come in; when to stay out? How to encourage the faltering but perhaps fundamental point. Again, setting is all-important. Basically the class should be getting on with its programme - theme study, unit study, anthological project, collection for an exhibition - then the occasion will arise and must be used to the full.

(b) getting the pupils to talk amongst themselves with, from time to time, the same level of probing intensity. Establishing the traditions of concession, of learning from others, of tidying one's own ideas against other people's, accepting criticism, offering self-criticism.

Does changing the opening "I wis gonny . . ." "I done something . . ." into your own accepted form really help? Can you combine the two? And does this make it all another school exercise?

Two essays that seem relevant here are Labov, "The Logic of non-standard English", and Blank and Solomon's, "How shall the disadvantaged child be taught?", both in Language and Education, the O.U. set book (Routledge and Kegan Paul, £1.20).

2. The second thing we should do is construct a reading curriculum that (a) develops and refines the virtues that our pupils already possess and (b) takes some note of their often difficult personal and social situation.

I have already indicated that we should organise a general curriculum that is socially based and has speech as its main medium. Central to whatever style of lesson management we deploy is the role of literature. I believe most profoundly that the impact of literature on our slowest learning pupils is exactly that experienced by any other group. They, too, need that introduction to imaginatively presented, distanced experience that only literature offers; the chance to feel, to try things out, to see events in perspective.

I see this influence stretching from nursery tales and rhymes, through primary school to every level of secondary school. And with every pupil.

Finding the material and finding ways of presenting it and bringing it into the commonwealth of class and school is not easy. Notes for a bibliography of ~ ding material for the non-academic/disadvantaged/slow learning pupil appear as ~ appendix to this lecture.

GENERAL ARRANGEMENTS

I have been suggesting here a special role for literature within a broad-based socially orientated curriculum: that literature should be a diet that is appropriate to the needs of our pupils and that helps them to face up to and grow beyond the problems of their immediate existence.

Our pupils admire certain qualities and hunger after them. Let us present these qualities in works of worth and genuine excitement which put them in the broad perspective of human affairs. I have suggested some. As teachers of English you can add to them at your leisure.

I should like to conclude by offering some admonitions to all about how the disadvantaged child can be helped through the organisation of the school.

1. He should (especially in English) be educated with his peers and receive, broadly, the same diet and curriculum in mixed ability groups, or broad bands/

bands that are really broad.

2. Far more accent should be placed on individual accomplishment - on developing individual abilities through display of the pupils' work on the wall, in exhibitions and at open evenings for parents.

3. There is a need for co-operation, collaboration and mutual education by English teachers and remedial specialists. Every English teacher should have skills in the teaching of reading.

Seventy per cent of our pupils come from social class III(2) and below - skilled manual, semi-skilled, non-skilled. If we include III(1) "Other non-manual workers" - shopkeepers, clerical workers etc. - it's 80%

They are too often, especially the bottom 30%, condescended to from Left and Right. They are neither inferior to NOR helpless victims of bourgeois society. I often think that our working class pupils are imprisoned not so much in middle-class schools as working-class schools. Schools that are respectable, cautious and conservative to a degree. The working class has its virtues - but seizing new ideas isn't one of them.

Our pupils do need a new curriculum - and the opportunity to talk about it.

I finish with a quotation from Piaget and Inhelder:

"It may seem that effective dynamic factors provide the key to all mental development and in the last analysis it is the need to grow, to assert oneself, to look, to be admired that constitutes the motive force of intelligence, as well as behaviour in its totality and increasing complexity."

Effective dynamic factors? Some outwith our control, but there to be understood and drawn on; some directly our concern - appropriate classroom atmosphere and approximate reading curriculum. Let the last word come from the poet:

"And they say there aren't boys like him any more."

They still say so. But there are. Lots of them.

APPENDIX

Notes for a bibliography of reading material for the non-academic/disadvantaged/ slow learning pupil.

S1

The Dog with a million fleas, S. Widdows. In Story 1, Penguin.

The Goalkeeper's revenge, B. Naughton. Heinemann and Puffin. esp.'Spit Nolan'.

The Guardians, J. Christopher, Puffin.

Happenings, books 1 and 2, ed. M. Wollman et al., Harrap.

Lanimer Books of verse, (senior), comp. E.I.S. (Lanarkshire), Blackie. esp. "Meg Merrilees", "An old woman of the roads", and "Puck's Song".

Touchstones, M. and P. Benton, Macmillan.

S2

'All Summer in a day', R. Bradbury. In Short stories from America, Nelson.

The Boy who was afraid, A. Sperry, (New Windmill Series), Heinemann.

Here today, T. Hughes, Hutchinson.

Old Mali and the boy, Sherman, (New Windmill Series and Guided Readers), Heinemann.

Sounder, W.H. Armstrong, Puffin.

Story, ed. D. Jackson and D. Pepper, Penguin. esp. "A Man called horse", D.M. Johnson. (In Story 3).

S3

Billy Budd, H. Melville, (Dramascripts), Macmillan.

The Bonnie pit laddie, F. Grice, Oxford University Press.

Every man will shout, comp. R. Mansfield, ed. I Armstrong, Oxford University Press.

'In the Winter of his life' and 'The Golden eagle', L. Patten. In Short stories from America, Nelson.

Penguin book of Scottish short stories, ed. J.F. Hendry, for "Smeddum" and "Silver".

The Red badge of courage, S. Crane, Macmillan.

Shane, J. Schaefer, (New Windmill Series and Guided Readers), Heinemann.

S4

My apprenticeship and My universities, M. Gorki, Penguin.

'The Birth of a man', M. Gorki. In People and diamonds 3, D. Holbrook, Cambridge University Press.

My Childhood, M. Gorki, Penguin.

The Mother, M. Gorki, Central Books.

Bunnit Husslin, T. Leonard, Third Eye Centre.

Commonwealth short stories, Ed. Arnold, (o.p.). For "The Tractor", J. Wright and "Down at the dump", P. White.

The/

The Country Girls, E. O'Brien, Penguin.

Flambards (Series), K.M. Peyton, Oxford University Press.

Love on the dole, W. Greenwood, Penguin.

New Orleans Sketches, W. Faulkner, Chatto. For "Africa" and others.

Of mice and men, J. Steinbeck, Penguin.

The Pearl, J. Steinbeck, Pan, and (Guided Readers) Heinemann.

Theme on Drink:

The Heather ale, R.L. Stevenson

Tam O'Shanter, R. Burns

John Barleycorn, R. Burns

Willie Brewed a peck o' maut, R. Burns

The Inheritors, W. Golding, Faber (extract).

The Ragged trousered philanthropists, R. Tressel, Panther.

'Red Cavalry', I. Babel. Collected Stories, Penguin.

Things fall apart, C. Achebe, (New Windmill Series and Guided Readers), Heinemann.

Three Glasgow writers, A. Hamilton et al., Molendinar Press.

Tortilla flat, J. Steinbeck. Penguin and Heinemann.

Tunes on a tin whistle, A. Crang, Pergamon.

Walkabout, J.V. Marshall, Peacock.